University of Alberta

The Body as a Locus of Control in New Religious Movements: Heaven's Gate and the Children of God

by

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Introduction: Thesis Argument and Outline

A large body of research exists in which scholars have documented the social psychological underpinnings of group cohesion and control within the context of new religious movements,[1] groups that seek religious identity, and ideological and high demand groups. Consequently, much discussion and debate surrounds issues such as psychological manipulation, thought reform, coercion, and control of the person's environment so that group leaders monitor communication, social contacts and relationships, and many or all aspects of the group member's life. In addition, the leaders of some new religious movements often exact pervasive control by insisting on high levels of commitment to doctrinal beliefs in an atmosphere where questioning one's faith is discouraged and even punished, at times severely so. Social-psychological factors such as these contribute to an in-group/out-group dichotomy, and the dichotomy usually intensifies over time.[2]

The purpose of my thesis is to supplement existing social scientific perspectives of group cohesion and control in new religious movements by discussing some of the ways that group leaders (whether intentionally or not) use the human body as a locus of control. I argue that, for some groups, control of the body is just as important as control of beliefs, and feelings. In some circumstances, the control of bodies serves

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[1] Scholars debate the term "new religious movement." Definitions, however, exist—"By 'new religious movements' sociologists of religion are usually referring to individual groups or organizations rather than to the larger movements or social currents in which these singular groups operate" (Kent, 1993: 83). The Harper Collins *Dictionary of Religion* (1995) discussed the problem of defining what precisely new religions are. It pointed to the diversity of beliefs and organizational structures that emerge in new religions. Moreover, the dictionary illustrated that since the 1950s, scholars have studied new religions from social, organizational, theological, and psychological perspectives (Harper Collins, 1995: 771-775).

[2] Most researchers of new religious movements discuss several methods of group cohesion and maintenance. See for example: Coser, 1974; Galanter, 1999; Lifton, 1961; Lofland, 1977; Robbins, 1988; and Stark and Bainbridge, 1987.

both to strengthen group organization and cohesion, and to further the in-group/out-group division. As such, I view issues revolving around the body as ones that exist in conjunction with other social-psychological and emotional methods of group maintenance and control. Indeed, I posit that the body issues that emerge within group settings often are inherently linked to psychological manipulation and control. To explain further, the body emerges as a locus of control, I also argue that often the personality of the group leader is inexorably related to group belief, maintenance, and control. Thus, the two central questions that I address are: *in what ways is the body a locus of control*, and *does a relationship exist between the psychology of the group leader and the manifestation of these bodily concerns*? Accordingly, I explore the connections between group leadership, group doctrine and practice, and the expression of the body in the group setting.

In my thesis, I examine two new religious movements, Heaven's Gate and the Children of God. In both cases, the leaders of the groups instituted (at times) pervasive control over the bodies of most, if not all, of the group members. Furthermore, because the leaders placed special significance on the human body, I argue that group members subsequently internalized these (new) body norms. As a result, group leaders were able to use these newly established norms to maintain greater control over group members. Most religions and new religious movements have some sort of doctrine regarding the body. In the case of Heaven's Gate and the Children of God, not only do beliefs about the body emerge, but also they are central to some of the ways that the group operates.

I posit that three different approaches help to explore the connections that exist between the group leaders and their groups. First, biopsychosocial profiles of the two group leaders Marshall Applewhite (Heaven's Gate) and David Berg (the Children of God) set the foundation for the exploration of body issues within each group. Thus, I argue that the identification of the biopsychosocial dynamics of Applewhite and Berg provide vital understanding as to why each leader developed such distinct and oftentimes bizarre perceptions of the human body. Moreover, I argue that these beliefs facilitated a control process manifested in each of the group's doctrines, practices, and rituals. Most of the group directives originated directly from the group leaders themselves.

Second, contemporary social theories of the body help explicate some of the ways that people understand their bodies. My use of a 'sociology of the body' approach allows me to draw on a variety of research that looks at the social location of the human body. Moreover, I specifically use contemporary and historical research that addresses the body from a social-religious perspective, a position that I adapt to the study of new religious movements and ideological groups.

The third approach that I use provides the vital connection between the beliefs of the leader, and their subsequent translation into the group setting. Attribution theory (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975; Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985) examines the ways that people perceive the sources of their behaviours, emotions, and physiological states in various contexts. Important to my thesis is that attribution theory investigates the process of interpretation. I use attribution theory specifically as researchers have applied it to the social-religious milieu. Thus, my use of this

theory allows me to understand *why* group members embrace the bodily beliefs and behaviours that they do within the group setting.

Thus, my thesis illustrates the often complex relationship that exists among the various facets of individual psychology (or psychopathology), group cohesion and maintenance, and the attendant control mechanisms (in this case those directed at the body) that the leaders implement (either specifically, or as a by-product of group policy). Moreover, attribution theory provides clarity of understanding to the nature of this complex relationship. As I argue, the connecting theme for these three groups is the body, an important component of our social world that currently is the focus of an expanding academic research field.

In *Chapter One,* I explore social and religious theories of the body, biopsychosocial profiles, and attribution theory. An examination of each approach reveals that the body, currently a "hot topic" in contemporary research, has a long tradition of importance to the group setting and to the individual. This tradition becomes evident in my consideration of ascetic movements, in my exploration of historical psychobiographies, and in my general consideration of the body in a socio-religious-historical context.

In *Chapter Two,* I discuss my methods and some of the guidelines that I have found useful for directing my research. Given the vast array of information that I have access to on each group, I address the process of selection. Thus, I discuss why my research takes the direction that it does, and what criteria help me to select the arguments and example that I use. I set out my own approach that is eclectic, yet structured, and invokes some of the ideals discussed by several other researchers.

Heaven's Gate is the subject of *Chapter Three*. The mass suicide of the members of Heaven's Gate in 1997 stimulated much debate about the causes of such an extreme end to a new religious movement. Using primary source materials in conjunction with existing research, I show how ideas about the human body derived from individual psychopathology translated into group belief and expression. I argue that the relationship between these two variables, in this instance, helped create the circumstances that lead thirty-nine people to believe that they were leaving this planet for a better existence in a parallel dimension. Numerous body issues emerged in this group, including the central belief in physical, bodily transformation from human being to an extra-terrestrial life-form. In this chapter, I illustrate a clear connection between the biopsychosocial dimension of the group's leader, Marshall Applewhite, and the social dynamics, including the (often subtle, but sometimes overt) control mechanisms in the group. Attribution theory helps to illustrate why and how group members were willing to embrace many of the group's often bizarre practices, including the final decision to commit mass suicide.

In *Chapter Four*, I turn my attention to David Berg and his self-styled "Christian" doctrines that promoted the overt sexualization of women and children. An examination of the group's doctrines and of the work of other researchers (specifically, Kent, 1994a; Kent1994b) provides the basis for my argument that Berg controlled the children and especially the women of the group to satisfy and realise his personal goals and desires. The female body emerged as one of the central foci of the group's attention. Consequently, I argue that many of the women in the group were subject to Berg's control, and that their bodies became the locus of this control.

Moreover, I conclude that his own history and his personal psychopathology largely fuelled his motives for control, and that they were instrumental to the social dynamics of the group. I argue, also, that the women, many of whom experienced emotional and physical abuse due to the nature of their roles within the group, interpreted their experiences within a religious framework. Thus, they attributed their roles and even their subjugation to the divine realm as purportedly channelled through the group's leader, David Berg.

In the concluding chapter of my thesis, I explore not only the common themes that emerged during my examination of the role of the body in these two groups, but also any differences and incongruities. Further questions emerge as the result of my thesis: Is this a useful approach to understanding the body in group settings? What are some of the likely strengths and limitations of this thesis? I explore these questions in order to establish an overall assessment of the utility of my research topic. Moreover, I locate my thesis not only within the context of literature on the body but also within that on new religious movements, and high-demand and ideological groups.

Chapter One: Analytical Approaches—Sociology of the Body, Biopsychosocial Profiles, and Attribution Theory.

Introduction

For my thesis, I use contemporary approaches to the body to analyze the ways that particular control mechanisms emerge within new religious movements and ideological groups. In concert with this approach, it is necessary that I understand the relationship between the psychology of the group's leaders and the development of bodily issues within the groups. I posit that I should not separate the two issues for my analysis of Heaven's Gate and the Children of God, as each component informs the other. I argue that the role of the leader is necessary to understand why the body functions as a locus of control, but in order to make the connection between the two facets of the group setting another form of analysis is necessary. Attribution theory allows me to make that pivotal link. An important social-psychological tool, attribution theory is an enduring approach to understanding the nature of human experience within the religious context.

In this chapter, I first review and discuss contemporary research and literature on the body, paying particular attention to discussions about both the body and religion, and the body in group settings. Next, I examine asceticism as it developed in traditional Western religions. The purpose of this discussion is to link older religious-bodily practices to the contemporary context of new religious movements. I then explore the utility of looking at the psychology of the groups' leaders. I review some psychobiographical accounts, and more generally, the literature *about*

psychobiographies. Finally, I examine attribution theory and its specific application to religion.

Researching the Body

Social science scholars have researched the body for several decades. In the last two decades or so, however, a surge of interest has taken place in researching the body so that, "Sociologists are abandoning the old dualism in which the body was left to the natural sciences while sociology concentrated on cultural and social matters" (Richardson and Shaw, 1998: 2). The recognition of the body in social science facilitates an approach that recognises both the body's materiality and the fact that it is, in part at least, socially constructed. Because of this holistic approach to the body, sociologists are able to account for body physiology, social meanings attached to the body, and social forces that help to shape the body and its context (Richardson and Shaw, 1998: 2).

A rich and expanding literature exists that examines the body from a social science perspective. Many researchers are well aware of the works of anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), and philosopher-historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Moreover, sociologists Max Weber (1864-1920) and Lewis Coser (1913-2003) discussed the body, but because they did not explicitly define their research in terms of the body, other writers often overlook their contribution in this context (with the exception of Bryan Turner who incorporates Weber in his own discussion of the body, specifically regarding rationalization). Contemporary sociologists and religious researchers also are turning their attention to the role of the

Researchers from many different disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology have contributed to the ongoing discussion on why research on the human body is important, so although my theoretical perspective falls under the rubric '*sociology* of the body,' current social scientific perspectives on the body are quite interdisciplinary in nature. Furthermore, to round out the discussion of the body in contemporary groups, it is fruitful to examine some of the literature that discusses the role of the body within historical religious traditions. Control of the body and its relationship to belief system is certainly not a new phenomenon. Many of the bodily beliefs and practices that emerge in some new religious movements either draw distinct parallels with, or exist as polar rejections of, the ascetic traditions that emerged in the Early and Middle Ages.

Scholars have explored, and continue to explore, the body from many perspectives. In his book, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (1993), sociologist Anthony Synott examined the body according to *body parts* and to *body senses*. His research looked at how people think and feel about their own bodies, and how these thoughts and feeling translate into their experiences of their everyday lives. Synott addressed the many ways that the body is important in our social world. He included a discussion of the body in religion, mapping the treatment of the body from Biblical times to the (post) modern era, providing abundant examples of bodily proscriptions and prescriptions. His discussion is wide ranging. For example, Synott examined the creation myth in terms of its consequences for the body—the male dominance over the female (because Eve sinned first), and the emergence of Western patriarchal societies. He posited that Christianity has perpetuated ideas about the

bodily weaknesses of women through scriptures (Synott, 1993: 44). Although women's bodies arguably were (and still are) physically weaker than men's, Synott alludes to the way that patriarchal societies connected this lack of physical strength (compared to men), to a moral weakness.

Social historian Edward Shorter (1982) also observed the bodies of women in historical context. He found that for many centuries women were indeed considerably weaker than men simply by virtue of the number of children that they bore and the subsequent diseases and infections that plagued them (Shorter, 1982:103-138). Moreover, he identified that for centuries men have feared certain aspects of the female body including the uterus, menstrual blood, and discharges associated with pregnancy. In many societies, men believed that menstruating women, pregnant women, and women giving birth polluted society. In the West, for example, they adopted a process called "churching" whereby men 'decontaminated' the women approximately four to six weeks after her child was born, thus allowing her to regain her position in society (Shorter, 1982: 288-289).

The 'problem' of women persisted through the centuries—their physical and moral being remained under the scrutiny of men. In Europe, from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, men punished women during the witch-hunting era because they believed women capable of witchcraft due to their supposed inherent corruptibility. Synott (1993) also pointed to other cultures and their attacks on the female body: foot binding in China, the killing of female children in parts of Asia, genital mutilation in some African countries, to name just a few (Synott, 1993: 46-47). Patriarchal traditions and the control of women's bodies that permeate the

Children of God literature are following a centuries-old tradition of female subjugation at the hands of men.

Synott also provided a useful commentary and analysis of how philosophers, historians, and sociologists have located and discussed the body through the ages. He noted that although we regard sociology of the body as a relatively new discipline, classical sociologists implicitly referred to the body: "Weber was interested with how much the puritans/capitalists made *themselves* suffer," (Synott, 1993: 260 [emphasis in the original]). Emile Durkheim discussed sacrifice, and Karl Marx observed how people suffered under the domination of capitalists. Later, Michel Foucault located the body under the scrutiny of a closed surveillance system, using Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison to express his ideas (Synott, 1993: 260). Foucault also discussed the way in which the conception of the "self" was historically variable in relation to ideas about the body.

Other contemporary social scientists have examined the relationship between the church and the individual body. Turner argued that Weber's discussion of rationalization located the human body in the discourse of discipline. Turner maintained, "Protestantism broke the umbilical cord that had traditionally united the individual to the institutions of the church" (Turner, 1992: 116). He argued that prior to the Industrial Revolution "bodies . . . are enveloped in a religious system of meaning and ritual" whereas the modern body is subject to individual, secular desires (Turner, 1992: 118).

Control, commitment, and community are just some of the themes that Lewis A. Coser (1974) explored in his book, *Greedy Institutions*. Coser examined institutions,

groups, and organizations that demand an exceptional degree of loyalty and commitment from their followers, and those people who for one reason or another are bound to them. He asserted that:

> the modern world, just like the world of tradition, also continues to spawn organizations and groups which, in contradistinction to the prevailing principle, make total claims on their members . . . . These might be called *greedy institutions*, insofar as they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty . . . . Their demands on the person are omnivorous (Coser, 1974: 4).

With this statement, and with his research, Coser made the connection between the ascetic monastic traditions of the Middle Ages and emergent sectarian groups and utopian communities in the modern (and now, we might argue) the post-modern era.[3] Many of his observations on the nature of these collectives implicitly imply control of the body. For example, he noted that the leaders of some groups favour the physical separation of members from their families and physical isolation from other communities, and that significant "role partners" are "surgically removed" (Coser, 1974: 5-7).

Other body issues are more palpable. Coser paid particular attention to sexual norms that emerged in greedy institutions. In this context, he discussed the Catholic priesthood, sectarian groups, and utopian communities. On the latter, he commented:

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[3] Coser (1974) described several greedy institutions, not just religious ones. He examined the modern family as a greedy institution and the demands that it makes on women. He also looked at the treatment of domestic servants. Additionally, Coser observed military and political institutions, and the nature of "greedy rulers." For the purpose of my thesis, however, I use Coser's analysis of religious and sectarian groups.

> communities opted for sexual mores which, manifestly involving contrasting types of sexual behavior, turn out to have identical social functions: either *regulated promiscuity*, or *celibacy* was the required, or at least favored form of sexual behavior. Both minimize the chances for the emergence of exclusive sexual attachments (Coser, 1974: 5-7 [emphasis added]).

This insight is of particular importance for my research on Heaven's Gate (the leader, Marshall Applewhite insisted on celibacy from his followers), and the Children of God (David Berg promoted "regulated promiscuity"). Importantly, both of Coser's concepts position the body as a locus of control.

Sociology of the body is a growth area of research both generally, and, as applied to religion. Sociologist Meredith McGuire (1990) identified several reasons why the study of the human body is important to the sociology of religion. First, our bodies are an integral part of our social self, and thus affect our notions of self. Second, our bodies are the means by which we experience physical sensations. Third, our bodies contribute to the "construction and reflection of social meaning." Finally, the body plays an important role in "power relations" (McGuire, 1990: 284-285).

These facets of the body are important to both the study of traditional religions and to the study of new religious movements and ideological groups. McGuire discussed the body in real, material terms. She looked at agency or the lack thereof, and at real physical experiences. The body exists as a part of our social world. For each person, body is an integral part of self, and our experience of our social world

relates to our notions of self. Second, the body exists as physical substance. This means that bodies are the means by which we interpret our reality and by which we understand the physical world around us. Our bodies are subject to an enormous variety of experiences including suffering, pain, and pleasure.

McGuire commented, "Our bodies are manifestations of our selves in our everyday worlds" (McGuire, 1990: 285). Because our social environment and "immediate social context" influences our concepts of self and body, she argued that religious researchers should explore the bodily experiences of religious adherents. She maintained that, "Exploring the somatic component of ways of knowing may give us a better approach for understanding alternate states of reality, religious healing, the effectiveness of ritual, and such spiritual modes of knowledge as 'discernment,' 'prophecy,' anointing,' and so on" (McGuire, 1990: 285-286). In this way, McGuire realized the importance of examining embodiment within a religious context.

McGuire explored the options for application of social scientific research of the body to religion by setting out these clear categories for analysis. She derived her criteria from an investigation of the work of a variety of people such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, and Mary Douglas. What appeals to me about her approach is that she has created a set of sociological criteria that are accessible to other researchers and provide a good framework from which to work and even expand upon if necessary. McGuire's criteria provide a simple, yet inclusive framework for my analysis of the body in the groups that I explore.

Like McGuire, social psychologist Alan Radley (1996) looked to the location of bodies in their social contexts and how people perceive their bodily experiences within those contexts. In his article, "Displays and Fragments: Embodiment and the Configuration of Social Worlds" (1996) he emphasized the role of embodiment, rather than just the "body." Critically, he observed, "embodiment is also about social worlds, not just those which are material and extant, but also those which are ephemeral and possible" (Radley, 1996: 561). Thus, Radley recognized that embodiment is not only about what the body *is*, but also about what the body may *become*. This is an important observation with regard to my analysis of Heaven's Gate. In this group, the members not only examined the nature of their current bodies, but also looked to how they would change. Their embodied experiences changed simultaneously with the nature of their closed social world.

Radley's discussion of shared meanings, shared behaviours, and social norms directs his discrimination between "body" and "embodiment." He reminds us that through social interactions our bodies reveal much about our specific social setting. We are not just bodies, we are social bodies, and—as McGuire (1990) asserted—these social bodies reflect a specific social meaning. Radley also discussed the body in terms of expressive displays (the conveyance of information in non-verbal interactions) within compartmentalized social worlds. In these settings, he argued that social "transformations" and "the reordering of cultural artefacts" occurs (Radley, 1996: 565). In these situations, he maintained, people engage in transcendent experiences that are fragments of, but still part of, the larger social setting (Radley, 1996: 565). In this way, these experiences simultaneously are

"fragments of society" and "total worlds" (Radley, 1996: 566-67). Although Radley did not discuss the body and embodiment in terms of a religion (or new religious movements), some of his insights supplement McGuire's criteria, and are useful to my analysis of Heaven's Gate and the Children of God.

McGuire (1990) and Turner (1997) argued that social scientists should expand their examination of the socially located body to the religious context. The research literature on new religious movements, however, offers scant discussion on the role of the body in group settings. Some scholars mention the body as an issue within a particular group, but do not then address the body from an analytical or theoretical perspective. For example, Balch and Taylor (2002) referred to the role that the body played in the Heaven's Gate belief system. While they gave a thorough *descriptive* account of the events that led up to the group's suicide, they did not *analyze* the importance that the body played to the development and subsequent demise of the group. Furthermore, groups such as Heaven's Gate and the Children of God made frequent reference to the role of the body in their own literature. Sometimes these references were quite explicit. Despite the frequent allusions to the role of the body by the groups themselves, it appears that most researchers have not made an analytical or theoretical connection between the body and social control within these groups.

The one notable exception that I have found is in David Chidester's book, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the People's Temple, and Jonestown* (1988). In it, Chidester explicitly addressed the role of the body in People's Temple. He specifically examined the ways that Jim Jones regimented the

diet, sleep, sex, work, and leisure of his members. Importantly, he connected beliefs about the body to the group leader, to group belief, and to group behaviour. Reflecting on Jones's socialist goals, Chidester commented, "The physical body was sacrificed in order that this social body might live and grow" (Chidester, 1988: 122). Furthermore, he noted that Jones frequently compared the body to a "weapon in the revolutionary struggle" (Chidester, 1988: 127).

Jones led his followers to the ultimate physical sacrifice when on November 18, 1978 the mass murder-suicide took place. Chidester realised that, for Jones, "Revolutionary death transformed the body into a symbol of an apocalyptic eschaton, a proleptic realization of the end of the world" (Chidester, 1988: 128). Chidester's study provided a thorough analysis of the body in People's Temple. As such, I need not elaborate further on this group. Because I intend to link the psychology of the leader to the body issues that emerge, it is interesting to note that Chidester also commented on Jones's psychological state, noting his deep paranoia (Chidester, 1988: 30). Given Jones's varied beliefs that he was God, black (he was white), more evolved than other people, and was an alien from another planet (Chidester, 1988: 82-83), one might conclude that he was also highly delusional. Delusions such as these are often symptomatic of prolonged drug and alcohol abuse (Siegel, 1996: 14) or schizophrenia (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; 287).

Sociologist of religion Elizabeth Puttick (1997) did not specifically examine the role of the body in any one new religious movement, but she did dedicate a chapter of her book, *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality and Spiritual Power*, to a review of women's bodies and sexuality. She addresses women's bodies

and sexuality both within the historical context of Christianity, and within the contemporary context of new religious movements. She identified that most new religious movements promote an ascetic tradition, opt for an antinomian stance, or ignore sexuality altogether (Puttick, 1997:106). Puttick examined the roles on offer to women in a variety of groups including Osho (previously known by its founder's name, Rajneesh), The Unification Church (also known in derogatory terms as the "Moonies"), modern Evangelical sects, and pagan, occult, and Wicca based groups. She discussed some of the Eastern based new religious movements that emerged in the early 1970s. Puttick examined the ways that some of them offered either sexual liberation for women or at the other extreme, exerted power over women's bodies by arranging marriages (for example, the Unification Church [Puttick, 1997: 107]) or instituting celibacy (for example, Brahma Kumaris [Puttick, 1997: 109]). Whatever, the approach that the group advocates, Puttick observed that the ". . . participants tend to validate their 'choice' as liberating and empowering. However, it can also be interpreted as a means of social control by the religion" (Puttick, 1997: 122). Moreover, she identified that the Children of God, under the leadership of Berg, as the most excessive example of a new religious movement in terms of its "manipulation of relationships" (Puttick, 1997: 123).

Puttick (1997) argued that the wealth of new religious movements that exist offer a wide variety of options for women. She acknowledged that the experiences for women in such movements are both positive and negative, but that regardless of the ways in which women's bodies exist in these groups, conformity and loyalty to the group leader stands above all else (Puttick, 1997: 123), and that exploitation and

control often occur (Puttick, 1997: 126). She concluded that in terms of the location of the sexual body in new religious movements all group members (male and female) should have "control of their own sexuality and emotional life" (Puttick, 1997: 128).

Chidester's study and Puttick's review aside, there is an evident gap in the literature on analysis of the body in new religions, so my thesis provides an important discussion of a research topic that I anticipate shall expand in the future. Both McGuire (1990) and Coakley (1997) discussed the importance of bringing sociology of the body to religion; I add to their appeal by suggesting that sociology of the body be brought to new religious movements, groups that seek religious identity, and other ideological and high demand groups.

Just as Coser (1974) reflected on historical "greedy institutions" to inform his research on contemporary "greedy institutions," I turn now to the ascetic tradition in order to examine some of the bodily beliefs and practices that emerged, and how I might compare and contrast them to and with the contemporary context. Because the two groups that I examine existed or exist within a Western context, I examine the Western ascetic tradition only.[4]

Western Religion and the Body: The Ascetic Tradition

An examination of asceticism is useful because it provides an historical-religious perspective of the body, and because the two groups that I examine adopt a position that I can compare to the ascetic tradition. Heaven's Gate embraced many ascetic ideals, while Children of God rejected ascetic traditions entirely, embracing instead a hedonistic theology particularly in terms of sexuality (though in reality, many

[4] This restriction also is a practical one. An analysis of Eastern ascetic traditions requires attention beyond the scope of my thesis.

peoples' experiences were painful both physically and emotionally). Their antinomian approach to religion exists as a complete rejection of ascetic ideals.

The early Middle Ages saw the adoption of Roman Christianity in much of Europe. By the late Middle Ages, the practice of Roman Catholic Christianity was widespread, and with it emerged traditions that set out specific proscriptions regarding sexuality, marriage, food, and drink. Although Jesus apparently led an ascetic life, Synott (1993) posited that the words of Paul have had a more enduring influence on ascetic traditions. He remarked that Paul warned against the dangers of bodily pleasures, gluttony, and alcoholic indulgence (Synott, 1993: 133). Furthermore, Paul brought forth the idea that the body is one's temple, and as such, one should use it only for the Glory of God (Synott, 1993: 12). Moreover, because of "the Christian theology of evil, the body became more central to the characterization of man as a fallen creature." The Christian conceptualization of "flesh" exemplifies their identification of the body as a problem (Turner, 1997: 21).

Most Christians adopted specific guidelines that had an influence on how they treated their bodies, but nowhere was this more evident and more regimented than for those men and women who chose to lead a monastic-ascetic life in a monastery or convent (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 34-35). As Wiesner-Hanks commented, "The residents of the early medieval monasteries viewed themselves as religious athletes, controlling all of their appetites . . . as a sign of their spiritual vigour" (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 35). Bryan Turner observed, "One major feature of traditional asceticism was the restraint and regulation of passions, which were seen to have their seat in the inner body" (Turner, 1992: 117).

One of the central themes of convent and monastic life was control of one's sexual desires. Women who remained virgins sometimes mutilated their bodies, hoping that would-be rapists would kill them instead. Monks sought to control both physical and mental desire, often fasting for prolonged periods in an attempt to achieve this end. Among the lay Christian community the development of the confessional allowed people to divulge their bodily sins. Oral sex, sodomy, bestiality, adultery, and incest resulted in some of the most severe penances of all (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 36-37), and sodomy became a criminal act in the 1530s (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 87).

Not all discussions of the ascetic tradition identify the body as a problem. Von Thaden (2003) argued that although the Christian ascetic tradition encouraged a degree of bodily mistrust, ascetics did not reject the body entirely, and the body was not an all-consuming object of hatred as some researchers propose (Von Thaden; 2003: 192). Instead, he posited that the ascetic tradition emerged not from bodily hatred, but from a fear of rebellion. Synott (1993) too recognised that the faithful have constructed the body as both "temple" and as "enemy" (Synott, 1993: 11). Asceticism emerged from scripture; the Old Testament described how Adam and Eve succumbed to bodily temptation and rebelled against God's will. Because of this account, ascetics (Von Thaden argued) viewed their bodies not with hatred but with mistrust. They required discipline in order to live as God intended (Von Thaden; 2003, 195-196; 202). Furthermore, the attendant shame that many experienced due to bodily functions and secretions resulted because they believed that time spent on the body reduced the amount of time one spent on his or her soul. Von Thaden noted:

> While it was recognized that vice could enter one's life through the body, the actual problem was understood as stemming primarily not from the body itself but from the undisciplined use of the body, that is privileging the desires of the body over the needs of the soul (Von Thaden; 2003: 204).

Attitudes toward, and treatment of, the body were central to many people, especially those who had strong ties with religious traditions. Following the 16th century Protestant Reformation, many new sectarian groups emerged in Europe. The transformation from a predominantly Catholic faith to the array of Protestant sects changed some aspects of bodily beliefs and behaviours. Max Weber's (1920) discussion of the ascetic tradition of this period explored some of these changes.

Weber identified and discussed two types of asceticism—the other-worldly asceticism of the monastic tradition, and the inner-worldly asceticism of the Puritans that facilitated the rationalization of economic and social conditions (Weber, 1920; 119-121; 174). Both types of asceticism illustrate the ways that the treatment of the body is subject to the religious belief system of the individual, and as Kaelber (1998), noted Weber recognized that monastic asceticism was the forerunner of sectarian asceticism (Kaelber, 1998; 12-20; 60).

The development from monastic, otherworldly (Catholic) asceticism to rational, inner-worldly (Protestant)[5] asceticism evolved because of the way that each religion approached salvation. Monastic asceticism requires the withdrawal from the world to the confines of the monastery where one removes oneself from the roles of ordinary,

[5] Weber identified four main types of Protestantism: Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and the Baptist sects—Baptists, Mennonites, and Quakers (Weber, 1920: 95; 144).

daily life (Weber, 1920: 81). More generally, lay Catholics attained salvation through the rejection of worldly goods—the doctrine of *consilia evangelica*. As such, one requires a state of grace to achieve salvation. Conversely, for the Protestant ascetics, accumulation of worldly goods was not itself a problem, as long as one remained productive, and adhered to his calling. The doctrine of *sola fide*—"by faith alone"—facilitated this way of being (Weber, 1920: 80-81). Weber pointed to the renunciation of the Catholic adherence to sacraments and mystical rites (as mediated through priests), and the adoption of a "pessimistically inclined individualism" by the Protestants as the most significant factor in the shift from other-worldly to inner-worldly asceticism (Weber, 1920: 105).

Weber discussed the Calvinist ascetic tradition in detail because it inspired other ascetic movements (Weber, 1920: 128). He paid particular attention to the doctrine of predestination and its centrality to Calvinist dogma. The principle characteristics of predestination include: God chooses only a small number of people for salvation; people cannot influence God's decrees; the decrees cannot and do not change; one does not know whether he or she is saved or dammed. Weber identified that Calvinists showed their faith (in salvation) through worldly activity. Thus, Calvinists abandoned religious ritual and ceremonies such as prayer and adopted a principled work ethic instead (Weber, 1920: 98-110).

The task of Puritanism generally, was, ". . . the destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment, the most important means was to bring order into the conduct of its adherents" (Weber, 1920: 119). Other Protestant churches along with the Baptist sects continued the Calvinist tradition as, "They absolutely repudiated all

idolatry of the flesh, as detraction from the reverence due to God alone" (Weber, 1920: 146). Weber argued that Quakers, even more callously than Calvinists, stripped people of the right to engage in fleshly activity and the "passions and subjective interests of natural man" (Weber, 1920: 147; 148). To overcome such temptations the Quakers engaged in silent and rational (non)activity; "He must be stilled in order to create that deep repose of the soul in which alone the word of God can be heard" (Weber, 1920:148).

As Weber noted, "The leaders of the earliest Baptist movement were ruthlessly radical in their rejection of worldliness" (Weber, 1920: 146-149). Worldliness meant indulging in bodily pleasures and temptations, "Without the inner light, the natural man, even the man guided by natural reason, *remained purely a creature of the flesh*" (Weber 1920: 147 [emphasis added]). Moreover, control of the body permeated all aspects of life. The Baptist sects warned against idleness, relaxation, sociability, more sleep than one needs, and luxury. They viewed sex as a tool for procreation only and stressed that the body and the mind existed for constant work and activity (Weber, 1920: 157-159).

Weber's discussion illustrated that Protestants perceived the embodied person as one prone to stray from Godly devotion, and as a result, the body emerged as a locus of control within the ascetic tradition. Weber's specific discussions of Luther's concept of calling, his analysis of Calvinism, and his examination of the Baptist sects revealed the ways that the bodies of the believers came to represent their level of devotion. Abstinence from proscribed activities, and appropriate conduct during those that the church allowed, shaped a population that controlled both their bodies

and their emotions. Moreover, as Weber described, the increased rationalization of all aspects of life including those such as the work place meant that people had to adhere to increasingly regimented routines. The body as a locus of control thus evolved in both the religious and secular setting.

Bryan Turner (1997) discussed Weber's recognition of the conflict between rationalization and human sexuality. The ascetic tradition is predictable; sexuality is unpredictable (Turner, 1997: 85-86). Turner posited:

> The rational control of these impulses through the institutions of celibacy and monogamy represents an important dimension of Weber's master concept of rationalization in which the emergence of labour discipline and asceticism in capitalism constituted a major historical turning point in the control of the body (Turner, 1997: 86).

The Church's demand for both predictable patterns of behaviour, and all too unpredictable human desires are common themes that other scholars also have addressed.

Social historians often credit the Puritan settlement of New England in the 1600s as influencing the "American attitudes toward morality, the body, and sexuality" (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 218). Clergy viewed sexual relationships (in moderation) within the institution of marriage as acceptable (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 226). Wiesner-Hanks quoted New England pastor Samuel Danforth, "Uncleanness pollutes the body." Unclean sex included adultery, sodomy, masturbation, rape, and bestiality. Moreover, the church and state regarded such acts as being heretical and

illegal (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 227). Wiesner-Hanks concluded that although the harsh penalties (such as execution for sodomy) have long since been lifted, Christian morality regarding sexuality still permeates our society. For example, with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in mind, she points to the language that some people used, and the attempts made by some to regulate adult sexuality. She posited that one can trace the strands of puritanical discipline and morality through contemporary discourse—this, despite our modern world (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000; 267).

In my analysis of Heaven's Gate, I will discuss some of the ways that the Christian sexual norms and prohibitions that have existed in one form or another for many centuries played a role in Marshall Applewhite's understanding of the nature of his own sexuality. Moreover, the traditional and restrictive definitions of sexuality that his family background placed on him contributed to his inability to come to terms with his homosexuality. He was raised in a strict Presbyterian household, and his father was a minister. As Weber commented, asceticism and sexual control " . . . have frequently operated together to produce hostility toward sexuality in particular religions" (Weber, 1922: 238). For Applewhite, his subsequent discontent with his own body manifested itself in the belief system that he created, although mental illness played a key role in the distortion and elaboration of his beliefs.

Applewhite believed that his sexuality sullied his body. Furthermore, just as the church demonised "deviant" forms of sexuality in prior centuries, Applewhite viewed Lucifer as the source of bodily temptations. Applewhite attempted to regulate and routinize the activities of his followers, at times, very successfully. He also maintained control of many bodily activities within the group, but all the time he was

painfully aware of the "problems" that each member's body might create. Applewhite particularly tried to suppress all sexual activity. Thus, the ascetic tradition of bodily control and abstinence is evident in the beliefs of Applewhite and his followers. I shall examine these beliefs and behaviours more fully in *Chapter Three.*

Conversely, in my chapter on the Children of God, I discuss the ways that the group's leader, David Berg, not only rejected traditional Christian sexual mores, but also literally rewrote his own scriptures so that his followers embraced and normalised sexual freedom, promiscuity, and sexual taboos (such as incest and paedophilia). In the process of writing his own brand of religious doctrine, he promoted the human body (specifically the female body) as a tool for men to use in the name of God. Rather than encourage the image of a faithful or chaste woman, Berg sexualized entirely the role of women and their bodies to the group. The sexualization of women is evident not only in Berg's writings but also in the many drawings that he used to illustrate his ideas.

Thus, Berg's approach was antinomian rather than ascetic, and existed at the opposite end of the bodily-sexual spectrum from that of Applewhite. According to Weber, the antinomian, ". . . possesses a subjectively appropriated state of salvation . . . . He feels himself no longer bound by any rule of conduct; regardless of his behaviour, he is certain of salvation" (Weber, 1922: 174). Moreover, Weber observed that, ". . . the more systematically the practical psychological character of the faith is developed, the more easily may outright antinomian results ensue . . ." (Weber, 1922: 197). Weber's insight is important to understanding the Children of

God. Berg, who called himself 'Moses David,' inculcated the belief among his followers that he was God's emissary. As such, Berg directed the beliefs and behaviours of the group, including those that were indeed antinomian (particularly "flirty fishing," [the Children of God's religious prostitution] and the encouragement of child-adult sexual relations). In *Chapter Four*, I discuss the ways that Berg's rejection of both ascetic traditions and contemporary sexual norms resulted in a view of women and children's bodies that placed them under the control of the males of the group.

Biopsychosocial Profile: The History of the Individual

"The dead cannot be interviewed" (Bainton, 1977: 19)

As stated in my thesis argument, I contend that for Heaven's Gate and the Children of God, the psychological make-up of the group leaders is also key to understanding how the body specifically came to play a central role in group doctrine and behaviour. The application of a psychological profile to understand better the nature not only of the group leader, but also of the group is a fruitful analytical approach. The establishment of a relationship between group leaders and group doctrines has scholarly precedent as several researchers have investigated the psychological profiles of group leaders in order to understand better the social identity of the group as a whole (e.g. Clarke, 1988; Erikson, 1958; Kent, 1994a; Moore, 1974; Sandeen, 1971; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 174-177). More generally, researchers have written psychological histories and profiles in many disciplines including religion, criminology, art history, military history, and pop culture.[6]

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[6] For example, see: Nagera (1967) *Vincent van Gogh, a Psychological Study;* Gonen (2000) *The Roots of Nazi Psychology: Hitler's Utopian Barbarism*; Anderson (1999) *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith:*

Furthermore, both Clarke (1988), and Kent's (1994a)[7] accounts of the psychology of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and David Berg respectively, revealed careful and detailed examinations that well illustrate the benefits of this approach to the understanding the role of leaders in new religious movements and ideological groups.

Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1958) is one of the best-known psychohistories (and one of the most debated). Spitz (1977) reviews Erikson's study of Martin Luther and concludes that despite some alternative perspectives that Erikson might have adopted:

> Erikson's book remains, nevertheless, a great achievement. His explanation of the problem of creative genius, the nature of historical greatness, the relation of an unusual man to his familial and social environment, and the phenomenology of religious experience constitute a major achievement.

Although Erikson took a psychoanalytic approach to psychohistory, he also paid attention to social and cultural influences. Thus, in his assessment of Luther, Erikson discussed not only the personal psychology of Luther, but also examined the socio-historical processes of the time (Spitz, 1977: 67). Roland Bainton's (1977) critique of Erikson's work is somewhat more critical. He questioned Erikson's sources (written interviews with Luther when he was age 50 taken by his students), and his assessments and interpretation of Luther and the period in which he lived. Scholarly debates over specific details of Erikson's work and of Luther's life will no doubt continue. That is a consequence of *interpretation.* We do not all interpret material in

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Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon; and Parker (1971) *The Formation of Napoleon's Personality: An Exploratory Essay.*

[7] I discuss Kent's (1994a) article more fully in *Chapter Four.*

the same way. Nonetheless, Erikson's work remains one of the most celebrated and cited psychohistories.

Religious studies researcher Ronald O. Clarke's (1988) compelling profile of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh illustrates the utility of understanding how the psychological characteristics of the leader affects the dynamics of the group. Clarke argued:

> A descriptive analysis illustrating how these [diagnostic] criteria apply to Rashneesh should prove helpful not only in understanding this particular guru; it may also provide clues that are useful in deciphering the personality and behaviour of other charismatic leaders of both the East and West who are currently competing in the spiritual supermarket (Clarke, 1988: 33).

Clarke concluded that Rajneesh was a narcissist whose need for adulation, his overblown sense of self-importance, his self-admiration, and his egocentricity permeated the community lives of his followers (Clarke, 1988).

Psychiatrist Anthony Storr (1996) explored some of the emotional and psychological issues with which some gurus or group leaders are plagued in his book, *Feet of Clay—Saints, Sinners, and Madmen: A Study of Gurus.* He examined the personal histories of many group leaders including Georgei Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, and Rudolf Steiner. He commented:

> Some gurus pass through a period of definable mental illness from which they recover: others deteriorate to the point at which most

> psychiatrists would diagnose them as psychotic . . . . others remain socially competent and reasonably well-balanced throughout their lives (Storr, 1996: xvii).

Moreover, Storr recognized that for the researcher (or the psychiatrist) oftentimes it is difficult to determine unconventional beliefs from psychopathology. He identified also that bizarre beliefs in and of themselves are not sufficient to determine psychological and emotional problems. Rather, one must look also to other factors such as authoritarianism, self-absorption, and *control issues*. These additional criteria certainly come to play in Heaven's Gate and the Children of God.

Many authors have reported bodily fixations in their investigations, even when the body was not the focus of their studies. Storr (1996) reported that due to ongoing bouts of physical and mental illness, Rajneesh ". . . felt as if the connection between his body and his spiritual being had disintegrated." Following a particularly prolonged bout of illness (Rajneesh suffered from ill health since early childhood), he put himself through a period of demanding schedules of physical activity before declaring that he had been enlightened (Storr, 1996: 49). Storr reported that Rajneesh turned to drugs and alcohol to escape his perceived physical and mental failures. Moreover, although he advocated abundant sexual activity within his ashrams, it appears that he was not entirely sexually satisfied himself. Storr commented that Rajneesh suffered premature ejaculation (Storr, 1996: 56). It seems that Rajneesh, dissatisfied with his own body (for many reasons), instilled an authoritarian control over the bodies of his followers as a substitute.

Accounts of historical religious figures also discuss the body. For example, Robert L. Moore's (1974) psychobiography of 18th century evangelist John Wesley discusses the strict physical disciplines of his childhood, including extreme regimentation of food and drink (Moore, 1974: 32). Wesley's mother raised him in an oppressively disciplined atmosphere, where she instilled the rejection of all bodily temptations, while concurrently imbuing the young Wesley with an aura of "specialness." As a young man, his uncertainty about his body led to sexual confusion and guilt and he felt shame at his body's physical and emotional response to young women (Moore, 1974: 38-39). Then, as an adult, and as a preacher, bouts of depression punctuated Wesley's life, and he continued to struggle with, on one hand, his expectations for Godly greatness and purity, and on the other, the physical desires and needs of his body and mind. Only when Wesley broke from the confines of religious tradition and began to evangelise "on the road" did he finally find some peace. By means of his evangelism he was able to achieve not only the greatness that his mother had conditioned him to seek, but also, he finally had the opportunity to make human connections, ones that gave him a sense of friendship and love (Moore, 1974: 48-49).

From the perspective of my thesis, Russell Shorto provided a more challenging position. In his book, *Saints and Madmen: Psychiatry Opens Its Doors to Religion,* Shorto (1999) commented that some people ". . . even after returning to sanity, continue to believe that their mental illness somehow pushed them into a state of spiritual awareness" (Shorto, 1999: 11-12). What appears to be skeptical comment is actually the basis for Shorto's argument that perhaps some psychological states and

experiences that people claim to have opened up a spiritual and supernatural dimension, are just that. He posits that the psychiatric profession has become more open to the idea that the boundaries between supernatural experience and psychopathology are less well defined that previously believed. Although Shorto provided arguments for his position, and some interesting case studies, I remain unconvinced. My own bias perhaps, but I posit that the specific symptoms of psychopathologies, and an application of attribution theory (which I discuss later in this chapter) provide a more parsimonious explanation for the experiences of the psychiatric patients that he examined. Moreover, Shorto's interpretation seems to presume that the most intense spiritual experiences are the purview of the mentally disordered.

Before discussing my own approach to understanding the psychology of Marshall Applewhite and David Berg, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the history of psychohistories. An overview allows me to say a little about terminology, research approach, and how my own research differs from many of the existing psychohistories.

Psychohistory is "...the application of psychology, in its broadest sense, or psychoanalysis in a specific sense, to the study of the past, of history" (Szaluta, 1999: 1). Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) popularized the tradition of psychohistory, thus the psychoanalytic tradition has dominated psychohistoric studies. One noted psychohistorian commented:

> the *why* of history necessarily comes back entirely to a *why* psychologically. Seen from this optical angle, history is what

> men have done; to know why men have done what they have, one must look for deeper motives, not more nor less (Binion, cited in Szaluta, 1999: 3).

For my research, the *why* many groups have done what they have, comes back psychologically to their leaders. Of course, each individual exists within a social-historical context and interaction exists between the individual and his or her social world.

Some contemporary researchers question the validity of applying psychoanalytic theory to history, and Szaluta (1999) outlined some of the central criticisms. The critics argue that psychohistory: rewrites history, that the evidence is not scientifically based, and that psychohistory is ostentatious nonsense (Szaluta, 1999: 49-59). Szaluta addressed these criticisms by turning to psychohistorians themselves. The following is a brief sketch of the main responses to the aforementioned criticisms. He found that those in favour of the psychohistorical tradition argue that psychohistory is a useful tradition in many ways. First, it enriches history rather than rewrites it. Second, psychohistorians use the same methods as other historians (for example, written accounts, photographs, manuscripts, and so on). Third, a psychoanalytic approach fills the historian with scepticism not because it is pretentious, but because historians already have their own firmly held conceptions about human nature (Szaluta, 1999: 59-76). My intention is not to contribute to the specific debate that surrounds the psychohistorical tradition that is founded on psychoanalysis, but rather to find my own way of understanding Applewhite and

Berg. My own approach is inspired by the work of Michael Howe (1997), and the biopsychosocial model (a model that I discuss more fully later in this chapter).

Howe (1997) gave a sensitive and historically aware discussion as to why he believes that, in light of modern developments in psychology, a psychoanalytic approach to understanding the individual is both dated and restrictive.[8] It is dated, because this approach does not acknowledge other psychological theories, including those that are empirically supported. It is restrictive, because psychoanalytic theory dwells on the role of the unconscious, without understanding contemporary conceptualizations of the brain and cognitive processes. (Howe, 1997: 236). Arguably, neuropsychology, cognitive psychology, and social psychology play a far greater role in contemporary understanding of human behaviour and thought than psychoanalytic theory. Of course, some researchers, both psychologists and those from other disciplines, still do use psychoanalytic theory.

My own inclination in psychological histories or biographies, is *not* psychoanalytic. Using Howe's invitation to explore other approaches (along with my own biases), I base my examination of the psychology of individual group leaders, instead, on a contemporary biopsychosocial approach.[9] This approach accounts for the interaction between human biology, cognitive processes, and the social environment, and is therefore not limited by the emphasis that the psychoanalytic tradition places on the "unconscious." Although the biopsychosocial model provides

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[8] Carl Rollyson (1995) also addressed the problem of dated and or misguided psychobiographies in his book, *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology.* Rollyson argues, however, that psychology and biography are compatible when researchers use a diverse approach that moves away from the reductionist tendencies of some previous studies.

[9] The biopsychosocial model is a holistic approach to medicine and psychiatry. This model has both supporters and critics, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in a thorough discussion of the support and criticisms that the model engenders. For a balanced account of the model, see Pilgrim (2002).

the foundation for the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* [*DSM*] (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 25), I argue also that it is important to move beyond the *DSM* when one seeks to understand psychopathology. In order to do so, one must review the appropriate literature that exists in numerous psychological, psychiatric, and social-psychological publications.

Rather than use the terms "psychohistory" or "psychobiography," both of which are linked firmly to the psychoanalytic tradition,[10] I use the term "biopsychosocial profile" to refer to my analysis of each of the group leaders. By combining the aims of psychohistory/biography with contemporary diagnostic tools, I analyse each leader and his connection to his group. As Howe (1997) asserted, "The author of a psychobiography starts from the position that psychology can help the biographer to understand the forces that drives a person's thoughts and actions" (Howe, 1997: 236). This statement echoes my own intentions. I want to understand the psychological make-up of Marshall Applewhite and David Berg. From this understanding, I hope to obtain a deeper comprehension of some of the body issues that emerged, and how these issues manifested in group doctrine and practice. In this way, I will connect both individuals to the social world and the social group that each instituted.

In his article, Howe (1997) provided an open approach that has room for flexibility and the individual preferences of the researcher. Furthermore, he offered some basic information on how and why psychological findings help researchers understand the development of an individual. Although Howe originally discussed

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[10] For a description of psychohistory/biography and its emergence and continued connection to the psychoanalytic tradition see: Cocks and Crosby (1987); Howe (1997); Itzkowitz and Vamik (2003); and Szaluta (1999). Howe (1997) offers a psychological approach to biography that moves beyond the psychoanalytic tradition.

the usefulness of psychological profiles in terms of understanding genius, his guidelines for research are applicable to other avenues of research. Moreover, he addressed both those researchers with a background in psychology, and those from other arenas who wish to engage in a fuller understanding of an individual for the purposes of their research endeavours (Howe, 1997: 240). Thus, in terms of sociological analyses of group dynamics, a psychological profile helps to inform the sociologist as to why particular social conditions exist in group settings.

Howe gave three reasons for using psychological information (although he reminds the reader that his list is not definitive [Howe, 1997: 240]). First, he argued that "psychological findings can make it possible to explain events that to anyone ignorant of them may appear mysterious and inexplicable" (Howe, 1997: 238). Second, he stated that psychological findings reveal that, as researchers we should not overemphasize any one specific event in a person's life. He pointed to the ways that some biographers have mistakenly attributed too much to an incident, and in the process missed other influences. As Howe commented: "often unnoticed routine background events of a person's life are in many respects far more influential than the more dramatic foreground incidents" (Howe, 1997: 238).[11] Third, Howe argued that a well-researched and well-supported psychological profile provides an accurate history of a person that the individual is unlikely to give himself. As Howe noted, people are notoriously inaccurate and incomplete in their own recollections (Howe, 1997: 239). The article also provides some methodological guidelines for conducting psychological research on an individual, although Howe stressed that it is not his

[11] Erikson was also troubled by the tendency of some psychoanalytic psychohistorians to embrace a reductionist approach that often looked to "significant" childhood events. He understood the importance of all events during the course of one's life (Erikson, 1958: 18-19).

intention to provide the definitive "how-to" guide. I discuss these methods in the next chapter.

As I progress in my analysis of each group, I use Howe's criteria as a guideline for my own research, with the intention that I provide a competent and full examination of each leader. Moreover, for my discussion of Children of God leader David Berg I supplement the existing psychobiographical analysis of him (Kent, 1994a) with a biopsychosocial interpretation.

Attribution Theory: Linking the Group Members to Their Leader

Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) applied the general principles of attribution theory[12] to religion in order to understand how people perceive the sources of their physiological states, their emotions, and their behaviours within a religious framework. Attribution theory is composed of three parts: an emotional component, a self-perception component, and an attribution-motivation component. Proudfoot and Shaver contend, "at least some religious experiences are due to diffuse emotional states that are given a particular interpretation" (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 319). Thus, when a person does not know the origin of an emotional-physiological change, then he or she seeks an interpretation for the experience. The self-perception aspect occurs when the person seeks an explanation not just for the emotional state but also for the attendant *behaviour* and activity. Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) noted, however, that the individual does not usually assess the source of this behaviour accurately. Critically, the relationship between attribution and motivation is important because a person's pattern of attribution influences his or her subsequent

[12] Attribution theory is actually a combination of three theories; Schachter's theory of emotion, Bem's theory of self-perception, and Weiner's theory of motivation. For a description of the synthesis of these three theories into one, and their application to religion, see Proudfoot and Shaver (1975).

behaviour. People might attribute an experience or event to an internal (personal) reason, or to an external (environmental or supernatural) reason. Moreover, the attribution process is a pivotal component to a situation that people perceive as religious in nature (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 318-321).

Of further importance, the authors noted, "Once the attribution is made, confirming evidence is much easier to find" (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 326). Furthermore, they also argued that most groups have as part of their belief system a framework for interpreting "events that are potentially discouraging." In this way, followers perceive frightening and unpleasant events as the work of evil or negative forces, and find further truth and certainty in their own belief system (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 327).

Bernard Spilka, Philip Shaver, and Lee A. Kirkpatrick (1985) expanded the attribution theory of religion. The authors identified that many factors contribute to the attribution process. They recognized that people attribute the event to the most compatible of several available explanations (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985: 2). Attribution to the most compatible explanation is motivated by a " . . . need or desire to perceive events in the world as meaningful . . . " (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985: 3). Moreover, people usually try to situate events within a broader meaning and belief system. The authors reported that people engage in attribution when they cannot incorporate events into their existing meaning system, especially when these events have an impact on how they view their control of future events. Significantly, *context* is extremely important to the attribution process. Thus, people attribute meaning according to the social environment in which an event occurs.

Oftentimes, people adopt the most parsimonious meaning. As the authors concluded, when the social context is religious, attribution to an event and experience are typically religious also.

They found also that the influence of other people in the same context is highly salient to the attribution process and that peer coercion may also be a factor at times (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985: 4-12). The attribution to the supernatural realm in turn maintains the person's belief system and adherence to the religious group. In this way, the strengthening of both individual membership and group cohesion takes place.

The application of attribution theory to my thesis is important not only to my understanding of why group members adopted the directives of their leaders, but also to why the leaders made a connection between their experiences and the divine—connections that then influenced their design of group policies and practices. Attribution theory greatly enhances my comprehension of the group members' willingness to adopt the directives of their leaders. In this way, I can develop a better understanding of some of the physical, bodily experiences and expressions manifest within the group—for example, in Heaven's Gate, the adoption of celibacy and the castration of eight of the group members (including Applewhite). Attribution theory helps to elucidate the process whereby the women in the Children of God accepted their subservient roles and the use of their bodies as recruitment tools in the proselytization process. One can more easily understand women having sex with potential male converts when one realizes that the women attributed Berg's request that they do so to the command of God.

Conclusion

As the previous sections attest, my approach to my thesis operates on three different levels. Although the main areas of analysis (the body, the leader, and attribution) interconnect to produce a whole, it has been easier to discuss each approach separately, all the while bearing in mind their inter-relationship. A review of the literature has led me to conclude that the central frame for my analysis of the body rests with the work of McGuire and Weber (although I explain specific idiosyncrasies using the research insights of many other scholars from a wide variety of research backgrounds. For example, my analysis of Heaven's Gate draws heavily from the work of anthropologist Hector Qirko [2002] and other social scientists). My consideration of the psychology of the group leader is guided by both my adoption of a biopsychosocial approach, and by the guidance that Michael Howe provides. Finally, attribution theory as it applies to religion provides me with the means to connect the leader to the bodily beliefs and practices of the group. The fusion of these approaches provides a holistic picture of the translation of the leader's personal issues into the group setting as expressed in the control of their bodies.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Qualitative Methods

For my analyses of Heaven's Gate and the Children of God, I used qualitative data from a wide variety of sources, relying heavily on both primary and secondary material. Published group doctrines, academic accounts, former member accounts, visual data (photographs, diagrams, and drawings), audio, and visual recordings all contributed to the development of my thesis.

The in-depth nature of qualitative research is a reflection of the multifaceted character of this form of investigation. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000) recognised that in order for social scientists to achieve the depth of understanding that defines qualitative research, researchers use a vast array of research methods and tools. The authors asserted, "qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretative practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 5-6). My intention has been to make full use of the materials and documents that are available to me in order to enrich my research with a variety of perspectives so that I can make each "[group] visible in a different way."

As Denzin and Lincoln commented, when the researcher adopts an eclectic approach, then often a clearer picture emerges of the phenomena under investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 4). Inspired by their approach to social scientific research, I bring together many sources to illustrate the body issues within each group. Moreover, by combining sociology of the body, biopsychosocial profiles, and

attribution theory, I further exemplify my aim to provide a comprehensive and integrative approach to my research. Methodologically, combining these approaches was, at times, challenging. My goal was to ensure that each approach informed the other to create a more comprehensive whole. Difficulties often arose, usually during the process of ensuring that each analysis remained relevant to the other. The temptation to pursue tangential avenues of investigation frequently emerged. This said, the development of the approaches ultimately resulted in the more holistic approach that I sought for my research.

Qualitative research literature is replete with descriptions of various types of research. An array of approaches exist that one might take. For example, one's work may be positivist, post-positivist, post-structuralist, or postmodern. Some researchers are critical theorists, or phenomenologists, constructionists, or ethnomethodologists, and so on. Methods that researchers use include: focus groups, participant observation, discourse analysis, metaphorical analyses, and so forth. Many contemporary researchers inform us that in the postmodern era, the possibilities are endless, that there exists no "truth," and methods of research and writing are open to experimentation. I am not confident that I can accurately locate my research into one particular research style or another, nor am I sure that I want to. I can provide, however, a detailed account of the specifics of my own methods, the ways that I gathered data, and how I refined the material to produce my thesis in its final form.

The process of data collection began nearly a full year before I put anything down on paper (with the exception of some of the Heaven's Gate material that began life as an undergraduate paper, but has morphed considerably since). During the

summer of 2003, I worked full-time in the Stephen A. Kent Collection at the University of Alberta's Book and Record Depository (BARD). My work there included filing boxes of donated material into the existing system. As I filed, I began to put into a box all information that I came across that related to the body in one way or another. Moreover, even before I really had much of a grasp on the direction that my work would take, I began to take note of body related concepts, behaviours, and beliefs from all books that I was reading at the time (and there were many books). As a result of this process, I ended up with a large collection of books, journal articles, and group publications set aside with my own comments and notes from each.

The method of narrowing down the focus of my research began once I started to think about my research proposal. I had to decide which aspects of each group I could realistically manage for my thesis, and clearly I had access to far more information than I could possibly use. By narrowing my area of study I could then sift through the vast array of material (written, audio, and visual), to determine what related to my thesis. Part of the decision-making process was inspired by the work and research of other people. So for instance, Balch and Taylor had discussed the body with great frequency in their work on Heaven's Gate, *describing* many of the regimented ways the group treated it. Thus, it made sense to me to focus on some of these issues and expand on their descriptions with an *analysis* of that material. I made other decisions based upon the frequency with which some topics came up. For example, Applewhite talked about the sexual nature of bodies so often that this topic became an obvious one for analysis. Of course, the material that I do *not* discuss

provides further context, but given the scope of my thesis, it is impossible to address *all* issues.

Likewise, for the Children of God, the practice of 'Flirty Fishing' (religious prostitution) has been the subject of much discussion on the group, as have the allegations of child sexual abuse. These discussions, coupled with the overt representation of women in some of the group's literature, prompted my analysis of the ways that women and children's bodies became a locus of control. Additionally the testimonies of ex-members that discuss their roles as prostitutes within the group, and how they had no choice but to comply, further led me to believe that an analysis of the body as a control mechanism was appropriate.

For both groups the leaders have remained psychological puzzles. For example, why did they behave the way they did? What led them to institute particular doctrines? I decided to examine the two group leaders each within the context of specific doctrines (relating to the body) so that I might achieve a better understanding of them.

As I began to write my thesis, I realised that I needed a connection between what was going on within each group and exactly *why* the leaders and the members continued to engage in the activities that they did. It finally occurred to me that attribution theory could help me understand more fully the situation within each group. At that point, I had to start reconsidering some of the material that I had already collected, in order to reconceptualize some of the issues. As a result of some of the new insights that emerged by using this theory, I did a lot of rewriting of material.

Keeping track of my ideas became a problem, so I started writing down ideas as they came to me in a "brainstorming" file, considering where I might use them in my arguments. I planned schematic diagrams, exploring what my arguments were, which researchers I would use, and how I saw the many parts come together as a whole. I drew up rough charts that helped me to map out the specific content of each chapter. These techniques help me to plan each of the main chapters on the groups, so that a continuity of assessment and analysis runs through them.

Each of these methods of data collection involved decisions that lead to hypotheses, new connective ideas, interpretation, and inspiration. The process of interpretation and comprehension is, for me, one that is *completed* during the writing process itself. Laurel Richardson (2004), wrote a piece entitled "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers.* She began, "In the spirit of affectionate irreverence toward qualitative research, I consider writing as a *method of inquiry. . .*" (Richardson, 2004: 473 [emphasis in the original]). She argued that writing is not just the end product of research, but that it is ". . . a method of discovery and analysis." Richardson provided the reader with a wide array of options to consider in the process of writing as methodology, but she remained open to suggestions; she commented, "I encourage researchers to explore their own processes and preferences through writing—and rewriting and rewriting" (Richardson, 2004: 473).

Richardson's love of writing is evident, and she described how the writing process is the way that she discovers new ideas and connections that she had not identified previously. She admonishes the notion that one must know exactly what

one has discovered before the writing begins. I have found no other writer or researcher of qualitative methodology that appeals to me in this regard. I too, discover as I write. Some of my best connections and insights emerge as I write. The investigation of my topic begins, of course, with reading texts (or watching film, or listening to audio, or looking at drawings), and I do begin the analysis at those stages, but my understanding of the material develops fully when I write. My own writing style is not as adventurous as some of the methods that Richardson proposes (such as poetry, and narratives of the self), but, I do share a goal with her, "I write because I want to find something out" (Richardson, 2004: 474). My writing allows for my interpretation, one that I explore using theories and examples.

In the following two sections, I describe some of the methodological guidelines that helped shape particular aspects of my thesis. The guidelines informed not only the variety of materials that I used, but also my approach to the use of other researchers and theorists. In addition, I give a brief overview of some of the particular materials that helped inform the writing and interpretive process for my chapters on Heaven's Gate and the Children of God.

I Qualitative Methods and the Body: Some Guidelines for Research

During my initial foray into research into the body, it became quite evident to me that some researchers draw from many different sources to examine body issues. My research method was no different. Although I drew upon a variety of research sources including both classical and contemporary scholars, one thing united them—my goal to bring forth those ideas that help to inform my understanding of how the body exists as a locus of control in new religious movements and ideological groups.

In her introduction to the volume that she edited, *Religion and the Body,* Sarah Coakley (1997) reminds us that the body has a long and complex history in the various religious traditions that have emerged over the centuries, and that we need to embrace many approaches to studying the body in a religious context. Furthermore, she warned that in order to fully appreciate the complexity of the body in context, researchers should avoid the pitfalls of only framing their research in terms of 'in vogue' researchers and their terminology—she refers here to Pierre Bourdieu; one could add Michel Foucault (Coakley, 1997: 5-8). Many researchers such as Bourdieu and Foucault have established comprehensive approaches to understanding the body, but Coakley's warning appears to suggest that social scientists of religion should not feel that they *must* use their works. Perhaps my own bias for unambiguous terminology and theoretical frameworks corresponds with Coakley's concerns.[13]

Some social scientists do identify themselves quite clearly with the language of others. Bryan Turner, for example, is obviously inspired by Foucault (and Weber, although the language of Foucault is more evident). He remains open, however, to a holistic approach. Turner (1997) addressed the key traditions that have emerged in the study of the body. He identified Merleau-Ponty's "lived experience" approach; Michel Foucault's location of the body in the power/knowledge structure of society; the anthropological view of the body as symbol system; and a socio-historical

[13] Moreover, to engage the works of theorists such as Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, one needs to dedicate a substantial amount of time become familiar with them. I feel it would be inappropriate just to use "soundbites" of their theories. Caterina Pizanias, who is a proponent of Bourdieu theory argued that many scholars who are very familiar with Bordieu's work cannot agree on the meanings of such central terms as *habitus* (Pizanias, 1996: 653). Thus, I believe that more philosophically oriented works certainly have potential for application to new religious movements, but by researchers who have a firm grasp of the central tenets of these theorists. Thus, from my own perspective, I feel more competent using those researchers with whom I have dedicated some time becoming familiar (for example, Weber and McGuire). My future research, however, may well take new directions.

approach that looks at the history of the body in relation to social and historical change. Turner's exploration of these approaches reminds the reader of the inadequacy of one-dimensional thinking.

Social psychologist Alan Radley (1991) echoes these sentiments. He argued that one should not seek to locate the body within one perspective, but rather bring together the material that one finds so as to integrate the ideas with the goal to inform and learn (Radley, 1991: vii-viii). Radley's objective in his book, *The Body and Social Psychology,* was not to create a new theory of the body, but to ". . . recover *the body* within social psychology. . ." (Radley, 1991: 28 [emphasis in the original]).

The comments of McGuire (1990), Coakley (1997), Turner (1997), and Radley (1991) inspired my approach to my thesis. From a methodological standpoint, I did not restrict myself to the ideas of one theory or writer. Instead, I brought together and integrated different sources of information in order to support my thesis's main arguments. Of course, it is impossible to be aware of all the possibilities for discussion, and indeed, too many perspectives may lead to confusion or lack of cohesion. As Coakley also identified, there are limits to what one can incorporate (Coakley, 1997: 8). What seems to be key, is that one maintain an *awareness* that the body, as central as it is to our life, is comprehendible from many perspectives. To combat the possibility of ambiguity, I used McGuire's (1990) reasons for using a sociology of the body approach. I used her rationale as an anchoring point for my discussion of each group, while also discussing the ideas and theories of others.

My thesis argument includes a statement about *control.* From this statement, it is evident that I took a particular viewpoint on how some new religious groups

operate, and this viewpoint was bound to influence my methodology. While my research position informed my reading of sources, especially those produced by the groups themselves, I supported this decision by illustrating specifically *how* and *why* the body has become a control mechanism within each group. Certainly, my interpretation is open to debate, but I am confident that I supported my position well.

Each of the chapters contributes to the development of my application of sociology of the body to the study of new religious movements and ideological groups. Each chapter, however, should read as an introduction to each area of study, as I believe that each is the springboard for further research. Furthermore, in keeping with the concerns of Coakley (1997), Radley (1991), and other social scientists, the framework that emerges from each chapter is a flexible one. I do not intend to make definitive statements about how people should understand the body, but rather I offer my ideas as part of a larger and ongoing discussion of our understanding of the body in the social world.

II Qualitative Methods and Biopsychosocial Profiles: Some Guidelines for Research

In order to construct accurate biopsychosocial profiles of Applewhite and Berg, I followed Howe's guidelines for conducting psychological research on an individual, although he stresses that it is not his intention to provide the definitive "how-to" guide. First, he reminds researchers that people's lives are unique (although individuality does not preclude the possibility that generalizations can emerge). Second, he asserted that peoples' lives are continuous, so researchers need to account for as much of that life as they can, rather than just isolated events. Third, Howe

maintained that description is as important as analysis, because it helps to prevent inaccurate and presumptive diagnoses. Fourth, he argued that researchers should try to take into account the person's *own* experiences of events (though this may not be possible). Finally, Howe asked that researchers consider the whole person, not just the facet that he or she is explaining (Howe, 1997: 241-245).

In order to achieve this holistic understanding of the individual, I have accessed as many different sources of information as possible so that my assessments of Applewhite and Berg are well-rounded. Moreover, in line with Howe's recommendations I ensured a complete history of each—one that spans childhood, through adolescence, into adulthood, resting finally with the history of the individual as group leader. I have accounted for the unique circumstances that shaped each man, drawing on the personal accounts of others, written records, and autobiographical detail supplied by the leaders themselves in their various writings and recordings.

Heaven's Gate

My investigation of Heaven's Gate began with a literature review. Because the group had existed since the early 1970s, and had gained media attention early in its career, other social scientists had researched the group, particularly Robert Balch and David Taylor.[14] I used their research as a springboard for my own investigation (which as I previously mentioned, began as an undergraduate paper). The biggest influence, however, was the primary material produced by the group itself. Marshall Applewhite and his partner, Bonnie Lu Nettles, made many audio recordings during

[14] For example: Balch and Taylor (1976), "Salvation in a UFO"; Balch (1995), "Waiting for the Ships: Disillusionment and the Revitalization of Faith in Bo and Peep's UFO Cult"; Balch and Taylor (2002), "Making Sense of the Heaven's Gate Suicides."

the period 1982-1985. They recorded approximately 150 hours of "classroom" sessions. During these periods, Applewhite discussed and taught his developing belief system. Importantly, in the process of teaching, he revealed his innermost thoughts about the human body, and provided vital clues to his personal psychology and how his own problems influenced, and became connected to, the social setting of the group.

I analyzed approximately thirty-five hours of tape time and have gleaned what I believe to be the most pertinent aspects of these sessions for the purpose of my thesis. Many of the sessions are quite repetitive in nature. Analysis of the tapes required careful listening. Furthermore, I integrated the process of listening and extracting evidence, both with McGuire's (1991) criteria for understanding the body in social settings in mind. Moreover, as I listened to more tapes I started to consider the indications of Applewhite's mental state. This integrative process allowed me to interpret the audio tapes more fully in order to understand the body and control issues within the group. In the early-to-mid 1990s Applewhite also made a series of video tapes, *Beyond Human--The Last Call.* Originally posted on the group's Internet web site, the films show Applewhite explaining group doctrine and belief in a final attempt to recruit new members.

Listening to many more of Applewhite's tapes[15] began as a personal project last summer (I did not realize how useful to my thesis this process would become). To keep track of the content of the tapes, and my own responses to them, I typed up summaries of each tape that I listened to. I did the same for the Heaven's Gate video tapes that I watched. The summaries contain comments about all aspects of the

[15] I had listened only to a few of them for my undergrad paper.

group, not just those that relate to the body. When I reviewed my notes, those aspects pertaining to the body were the ones that I paid particular attention to due to the research focus of my thesis.

The group's material provides in-depth insight to the workings of the group and provides compelling supporting evidence for my thesis. The primary materials afforded me significant information and insight, and they illustrate the importance and utility of primary sources to methodology. My analysis of Applewhite also involved an in-depth investigation of paranoid schizophrenia. To understand the workings of this condition I used the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) as well as books written by psychiatrists who are experts in this area of research.

The Children of God

Like Heaven's Gate, the Children of God generated a great deal of academic study, so my investigation of this group began with a (lengthy) literature review. Also like Heaven's Gate, Children of God left a legacy of primary materials that facilitate a deeper understanding of the group, their leader David Berg, and the body and control issues that existed. Berg disseminated his belief system primarily through a series of publications called the *Mo Letters*. In these written doctrines, he provided the group with a comprehensive set of prescriptions and proscriptions, many of which centred on how he viewed the bodies of both the women and the children of the group.

In addition to the written text content, many of Berg's *Mo Letters* feature an abundance of illustrations and catch-phrase style headings that convey quite explicitly

his expectations for the physical behaviour of women and children, especially of women. The visual material takes the form of graphic-novel style illustrations and photographs. Often, when using visual data of this nature, researchers use content analysis to decipher the meaning of the content. This technique was not necessary to address the Children of God material. The material is blatant in its sexual representation of women. Moreover, the accompanying headings and text clearly express Berg's views on women's reputed purpose.

In addition to the primary documents that the group produced, I also used academic accounts in my analysis of the group. Of particular use was Stephen Kent's (1994a) article on the psychology of the group's leader. This piece provided an initial framework for my investigation of David Berg and the way that his personal life influenced the sexual body norms that he developed within the group in tandem with his reinterpretation of Christian scripture. An array of other materials informed my investigation of this group. Many other scholars have investigated particular aspects of it, and my own research relies on such work for context and background. Thus, the research of academics, James D. Chancellor (2000), Stephen Kent (1994b), and David Van Zandt (1991), have been influential. Some of their insights into the attractions of the Children of God, and some of the social ideals that the group promoted, help us to understand why people joined, and why (despite some of the conditions) they remained in the group.

Researchers and filmmakers have made many documentaries about Children of God over the years. Of particular use for my thesis was director John Smithson's 1994 documentary about the Padilla family, the husband and wife of which joined the

group in the mid-seventies and remained in it for eighteen years.[16] The program is a series of interviews with the mother (Sylvia Padilla) and her daughters (Deborah, Victoria, and Miriam). The interviews are particularly revealing regarding the women's adoption of sexual mores (such as FFing, and stripping). More disturbing are the daughters' frank discussions about their first sexual encounters and the patterns of abuse, coercion, and fear that permeated their lives from a young age. Moreover, Sylvia discusses her reasons for joining and then staying in the group, in addition to the justifications and attributions that she made for remaining in an at times fearful environment.

Another useful source was an account written by Deborah Davis (with her husband Bill Davis) who is David Berg's daughter. Her book, *The Children of God: The Inside Story* (1984), recounts her life in the shadow of a self-pronounced prophet. Her book is a highly personal and revealing account of childhood abuse, the complexity of living in a high-demand family atmosphere, and of a familial setting infused with religious fervour, apocalyptic prophecy, and an often stressful life of extreme commitment to questionable ideals. Davis also revealed her own feelings of guilt and shame. Davis's complicity haunts her. As an important member of the Berg family (her father put her in positions of authority) Davis feels at least partly responsible for some of the conditions within the group. Her account is important to my thesis not only for her description of the ways that women were treated, but for her detailed account of the Berg family history, the development of the Children of God, and the complex interrelationships that evolved therein.

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[16] The documentary, *Children of God*, was originally made for Channel 4 in the U.K. The film was shown in Canada in 1995 on "The Passionate Eye" documentary series.

Other ex-member accounts provide my thesis with personal confirmations of manipulation and control. Miriam Williams's (1998) account, *Heaven's Harlot's: My Fifteen Years in a Sex Cult,* tells her story of joining the cult and of adopting Flirty Fishing. She gave frank, detailed, and revealing insights in to the nature not just of the group, but of her own attributions. Her commentary provided me with invaluable information about how women responded to their positions in the group.

Additionally, newsletters published by ex-members describe in detail some of the many sexual abuses that occurred within the group. Although personal accounts are by their very nature, highly subjective, when one sees the same details emerging repeatedly, then the validity of such accounts increases.

Thus, a rich and varied base of material exists that has helped inform my thesis. The use of both primary and secondary sources of a variety of types has played a vital role in providing a full account of Berg's personal history and psychology and its translation to the group setting. Moreover, Berg's own writings, and the accounts of former members reveal how and why the group members accepted some very questionable practices (that were often detrimental not only to themselves, but also to their families) and the attribution process that made this possible.

The work of scholars and the experiences of ex-members guided my research of this group, and the selection of material that I made. Others have documented the location of women at the forefront of the recruitment process, and the subjection of both women and children to much sexual attention. I have selected the material for my research on Children of God based on these concerns, but with the aim to

understand how women and children's bodies became loci of control, and how they responded to processes that put them in that position.

Davis's account, the work of other researchers, and the writings of Berg himself (in conjunction with a review of the literature on incest and pedophilia)[17] have helped to shape my understanding of the Children of God's founder. Moreover, much evidence (including his own words) suggests that he was an alcoholic. Together, this material has provided a comprehensive picture of a person whose control issues emerge from his own troubled and at times abusive background. The complex interrelationship of childhood abuse, incest, and pedophilia, fuelled by problems of alcoholism, translated his personal demons into the Children of God's belief system and its attendant bodily practices.

[17] For example: DeYoung (1982); Mayer (1985); Feierman (1990); and Itzin (2001).

Chapter Three: Heaven's Gate

Introduction

Believing that there was nothing more for them to accomplish on Earth, thirty-nine people willingly took their own lives in March 1997 in a San Diego suburb. For these individuals death was welcome, and merely represented the shedding of earthly bodies so that they could release their true entities to Heaven. The members of the Heaven's Gate group, along with their leader Marshall Herff Applewhite, had been preparing for the event for some time. In fact, for over twenty-five years, Applewhite had been redefining the meaning of life, in preparation for death.

In this chapter, I show how Marshall Applewhite and his partner, Bonnie Lu Nettles, created a group that maintained social cohesion through a complex series of relationships involving ideas about the body and sexual identity, and a belief system based on Christian doctrine, and extra-terrestrial life. Furthermore, I shall explore how Marshall Applewhite's personal issues with his own body and sexual identity permeated the belief system that he and Nettles established. I propose that the personal problems that Applewhite suffered, and their subsequent translation into a group setting, was mediated by the mental health problem that he endured—namely, paranoid schizophrenia. Moreover, Applewhite's personal history helps us to understand why he developed a group that adhered to practices reminiscent of the asceticism that Weber (1920) described.

Many of Applewhite's concerns centred on the body, and as such, the body became a locus of control within the group. An examination of the body is particularly pertinent to the study of Heaven's Gate. The body was *the* central issue

for this group. An exploration of how group members attributed their beliefs and behaviours to the divine prophecy of other-worldly beings (as supposedly mediated through Applewhite) helps to explain member adherence to some of the often, bizarre, and even punishing bodily practices.

Literature Review

Several academic studies exist on Heaven's Gate, but none takes the approach that I advocate here. While all of the existing research contributes to the understanding of Heaven's Gate, I propose that social scientific research on the body, a biopsychosocial profile of Marshall Applewhite, and a discussion of attributional processes reveals further the complex dynamics of the group.

Robert Balch and David Taylor, for example, have examined Heaven's Gate intermittently over a twenty-five year period, and their research provides a foundation for my own study. Balch and Taylor examined the group in several contexts. In 1976 they wrote "Salvation in A UFO." In this article, they recounted the group's early days and their first brush with public interest. They described the type of people who converted to the group and some of things that they gave up in order to do so. Moreover, they based the account on their own experience of the group, having spent several weeks travelling with them. The following year Balch and Taylor discussed the group's attraction to new recruits in "Seekers and Saucers: The Role of the Cultic Milieu in Joining a UFO Cult" (Balch and Taylor, 1977).

Three years later, Robert Balch (1980) studied the maintenance of group members in terms of role theory, noting some people's willingness to embrace the role that Applewhite and Nettles gave them. Members welcomed the sense of

purpose they received by training for a transcendental state of being. Then, when Balch re-analyzed the group in 1995, he used drift theory and social influence theory to examine commitment and control issues. He described many of the processes that I argue situate the body as a locus of control.

Following the tragic end to the group in 1997, Balch and Taylor (2002) collaborated again to write a full descriptive history of the group's development, its core beliefs, and some of the behaviours in which its members engaged. Again, they frequently mentioned the body, but they did not analyse it as a locus of control. Moreover, the authors mentioned Applewhite's visions and his claim that he heard voices, but they did not contextualize these phenomena.

More recently, Winston Davis (2000) studied the group by examining the role of religious obedience in maintaining group cohesion. In the same year, Hugh B. Urban (2000) researched Heaven's Gate from a technological perspective—interpreting the group as a response to "...the cold and sterile world of hyperspace." (Urban, 2000: 270).[18] Neither of these authors, however, identified either Applewhite's mental illness or the importance that the group placed on body issues.

In this chapter I outline the major symptoms of schizophrenia in order to provide a framework in which to locate Applewhite's beliefs and attributions about the human body. Then, I observe some of the key ways that the body emerged as a locus of refinement and control. Attributional processes about the nature of bodies took place not only at the leadership level but also among the members of the group. Facets of attribution theory allow me to show continuity from the leader's psyche to the

[18] Surely this interpretation is overstated, since the majority of recruitment to Heaven's Gate took place prior to the emergence of the World Wide Web.

group's belief system and associated practices. Where appropriate, therefore, I continue my discussion of some of the symptoms of schizophrenia in order to illustrate further the origin of some of Applewhite's ideas, fears, and obsessions. Social scientific research of the body (for example, Coser 1974; McGuire, 1990; Radley, 1996: Weber, 1920) suggests how the translation of these ideas functioned as social control mechanisms within the group setting.

First, however, I provide a general overview of Applewhite's personal background. His upbringing sets the foundation for some of the body issues that he later dwelled upon.

Marshall Applewhite: A Biopsychosocial Profile

I Social and Family History

Applewhite (1932-1997) was born to a modest family in Texas. His father was a Presbyterian minister, and Applewhite became actively involved in religious pursuits in early childhood (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 17). At age twenty he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in philosophy before enrolling in United Theological Seminary of Virginia. He decided that he, too, would become a minister as his father had been before him. In the same year, 1952, Applewhite married Anne Pearce and soon started a family. Over the next fifteen years his career took several turns—he joined the military, studied music at university, and then finally landed a teaching position at the University of Alabama. Applewhite's life took a downturn, however, when he was fired following accusations that he had an affair with a male student. As a result of the allegations he and his wife separated (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 17).

Following a move to Houston in 1965, he lived an openly gay life for at least a short period. From the mid-to-late 1960s, Applewhite had a fairly successful life in Houston where he became a prominent member of the local music and arts scene. It appears that he was a well liked and well respected member of the community (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 18). But his image tarnished when once again rumours circulated that he was having an affair with a student, this time at the University of St. Thomas where he taught. The failure of his heterosexual marriage, followed by a series of same sex relationships was soon followed by his complete abstention from sex. This pattern suggests that Applewhite had trouble coming to terms with his own sexuality.

Given Applewhite's struggle with his sexuality, it seems likely that in order to control the sexual nature of his body, he decided that total abstinence from sex would provide him with the means to manage his urges. His inability to accept his own sexuality may have occurred for a variety of reasons, but it is likely that his strict religious upbringing played a key role.

The Presbyterian Church, like many other churches, has had a difficult time accepting the gay community and the idea of gay marriages. Even recently, polls within the Presbyterian Church result in little support for those involved in same sex relationships (*Christianity Today*, 2000: 46). VanderStoep and Green (1988) conducted a study to investigate the relationship that exists between religiosity and intolerance of homosexuality. They report that research has established a strong positive correlation between people with high levels of religiosity and homophobia. Furthermore, due to the durability of beliefs of this nature, it is extremely difficult to

change people's views on homosexuality (VanderStoep and Green, 1988: 145-146). It is highly probable that Marshall Applewhite's family regarded homosexuality as contrary to God's will. Consequently, at whatever point Applewhite understood his attraction to men, he would have tried to suppress it.

Given Applewhite's strict religious upbringing—one in which homosexuality was neither accepted nor tolerated—it is not surprising that Applewhite felt deeply troubled by his sexuality and with his body. His internalization of such negative beliefs made it difficult for Applewhite to accept his own attraction to men. This forbidden attraction may account for his prompt marriage to Anne Pearce as soon as he graduated. He may have felt that his body let him down, that it did not live up to God's, his father's and his own expectations. Although Applewhite did live an openly gay life for a period of time in Houston, perhaps guilt or fear of reprisals (divine or otherwise), plagued him until he concluded that the only solution was complete sexual abstinence. Interestingly, despite Applewhite's misgiving about his sexuality, he later claimed that "the gay world" represented a positive evolutionary advancement because it brought people closer to a world of no sex at all—presumably because same sex unions do not result in reproduction (Applewhite and Nettles, 1982d). Certainly, when he met Nettles, there was no sexual desire on his part (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 20). Because of the lack of information on Nettles's background, it is difficult to understand her willingness to embrace celibacy.[19] What is certain, is that together they developed an extremely complex set of beliefs that

[19] The definition of celibacy requires clarification. Often scholars refer to celibacy as a complete abstention from sex. The true definition of celibacy, however, is a state of non-marriage. Chastity is abstention from sex (O'Malley, 2002: 7). Given, however, that Applewhite used the word celibacy to mean abstention from sex, that is the meaning I apply to it within the context of this study.

centred on the role of the body and how it impinges on the "true" purpose of human beings. The many hours of audio and video that are Applewhite's and Nettle's legacy are a testament to that belief.

I posit that Applewhite's concerns about sexuality and his confusion and disdain over his body amplified with the onset of ever-intensifying schizophrenic delusions. I turn now to a discussion of schizophrenia and the way that this condition helped to shape Applewhite's beliefs about the human body.

II An Argument for Schizophrenia

Following Applewhite's death in 1997, psychiatrist Alfred Honig stated that Applewhite's behaviour bore all the hallmarks of schizophrenia (Honig interviewed in Broder, 1997). I posit that Honig's diagnosis was correct, and in the following section, I illustrate some of the main features of Applewhite's personal history that support this conclusion. I discuss the characteristics of schizophrenia as they relate to specific aspects of Applewhite's concerns about, obsessions with, and actions directed toward the body.

Applewhite's history unveils an adolescence and young adulthood during which he internalized strict moral and ethical values. Furthermore, Applewhite's passage into adulthood was fraught with sexual insecurity. The problems that he endured and the sense of confusion that he experienced were exacerbated, I argue, by the onset of his symptoms of schizophrenia. As he approached middle age he was hospitalized for what I believe was his first full-blown schizophrenic episode. Schizophrenia usually emerges sometime from late adolescence to mid-thirties, but, the illness can appear at any age (American Psychiatric Association, 1999: 281). Applewhite was in his late

thirties or early forties at the time of his hospitalization, though less severe symptoms probably emerged earlier. Research consistently indicates that the appearance of the symptoms of schizophrenia is often a long, gradual process (although in some cases onset of the condition is rapid).[20]

Applewhite's hospitalization occurred in the early 1970s, and although I maintain that it was likely due to his mental health problems, the reason remains, at least officially, unclear. In an interview his sister claimed that he had a heart condition, while others maintain that his visit was due to a mental health breakdown. Still others suggest that he overdosed on drugs (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 19). In 1972, shortly after his hospitalization, Applewhite met Bonnie Lu Nettles. Less is known about her life except that she worked as a nurse, and had a keen interest in the occult, astrology, and Theosophy (Balch, 1995: 141-142). Furthermore, she claimed to be in contact with the dead through the process of channelling (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 20). When she met Applewhite she was married with four children. Nettles and Applewhite felt an immediate affinity for one another, sensing that they had met in a previous existence. They believed that they had been destined to meet one another again (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 210).

Applewhite's encounter with Nettles was a major turning point in his life. Nettles' impact on the then vulnerable and sexually confused Applewhite is key to the subsequent development of the group, as she was responsible for reinforcing his

[20] For a detailed review of the literature, see McKenna (1994). McKenna also provides a good review of the debates that surround the specific origins of schizophrenia. He comments that after decades of research no conclusive evidence exists. Researchers have examined schizophrenia from psychodynamic approaches; biological approaches (the role of genetics; the possibility of structural and functional brain abnormalities); and from a variety of other perspectives (including cerebral injury, and neuropathalogical abnormalities). Although the specific aetiology of schizophrenia remains unknown, most researchers agree that the condition does not stem from psychological factors, or from brain disease. Most evidence points to other biological and genetic origins (McKenna, 1994: 98-134).

emerging delusional beliefs. When Applewhite confided that he had been having frightening visions and dreams—one of which had revealed him as a Christ-like figure—Nettles prophesized his role on Earth. Furthermore, Nettles claimed that, previously, she had been in contact with extraterrestrial beings who had revealed to her that she would meet a person such as Applewhite (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 210). The two became inseparable and sought to find an explanation for their relationship. In the year following their meeting, friends and family report that Applewhite suffered from a bout of mental illness. A friend of both Applewhite and Nettles wrote at the time that they both suffered from mental health problems. Furthermore, Applewhite himself claimed that he and Nettles communicated through the voices in their heads (Perkins and Jackson, 1997: 21).[21]

Schizophrenia is generally defined by *positive symptoms* (symptoms that involve an "excess or distortion of normal functions") and, or *negative symptoms* (that indicate a "diminuation or loss of normal functions). Positive symptoms include "disorganized speech" and "disorganized behaviour," as well as delusions. Delusions are often paranoid, persecutory, grandiose, and centred on somatic or bodily concerns. Moreover, delusions are sometimes religious in nature. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 274-275). McKenna reports that many schizophrenics focus on sexual delusions, including the belief "that one's sex is changing" (McKenna, 1994: 4).

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[21] Bonnie Lu Nettles remains an unsolved part of the Heaven's Gate puzzle. So little information is available concerning her background, that it is difficult to obtain a clear picture of her personal life and of her personality. Although her impact on Applewhite was tremendous, it is uncertain if her communication through the "voices in their heads" was something that she too perceived. Alternatively, it is possible that, given her keen interest in the paranormal and Theosophy, she encouraged Applewhite's delusions and felt comfortable in her-new found role as his soul mate and guide.

Lucifer (or "Luci" as Applewhite called him) was the object of his paranoia—Applewhite referred to Luci on many occasions during the classroom sessions. He warned the group members that Lucifer was always trying to "get them." Certainly, Applewhite felt persecuted, particularly by his nemesis, Lucifer. His plans were most definitely grandiose—he believed that he and his followers were the 'chosen few'—that they alone would go on to live eternally as superior, more evolved beings. The members of Heaven's Gate came to believe that they had a very special purpose, and that the spaceship that would come to Earth, would pick up only them. Moreover, Applewhite felt that he was following in Christ's footsteps and that only he possessed the knowledge that could help save those on Earth who heard his message.

Delusions that centred on his body plagued Applewhite. He believed that gender change was possible and he often commented on how he needed to control his body and make it ready for physical transformation. Applewhite's delusions were indeed centred on a religious theme. The Heaven's Gate belief system was replete with traditional Christian doctrine, albeit blended with extraterrestrial ideas. Applewhite spent many hours discussing his interpretation of the scriptures with the group. He claimed divine knowledge of the universe and proposed that he and Nettles would provide their followers with the knowledge required for salvation. Furthermore, Applewhite blended Christian scripture with a theology that he maintained he received from extra-terrestrials. He indicated also that all other religions were the work of Lucifer.

Auditory hallucinations are a symptom of schizophrenia generally, but the paranoid sub-type of schizophrenia is *characterized* by prominent auditory

hallucinations, although other cognitive abilities such as speech and emotional expression may remain in tact (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 287). Applewhite was intelligent, and often was very articulate and socially accomplished—attributes that no doubt were bolstered by his background in the performing arts. Applewhite's claim that he and Nettles communicated via the voices in their heads is an example of such auditory delusions. Later, Applewhite claimed direct communication with extra-terrestrial or Next Level beings.[22] Auditory hallucinations well explain his self-proclaimed contact with these creatures who told him how and why he should prepare his body for the Next Level.

Among the many and varied symptoms of schizophrenia, some of the most common and most apparent include disorganized thinking, cognitive slippage, loose associations, and tangentality (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 276-277). Applewhite exhibits all of these symptoms during many of the taped classroom sessions. Often he lost track of what he was saying, or started talking about something entirely unrelated to his previous articulation, making spurious connections between topics.

It is more difficult for me to assess whether Applewhite suffered from any of the negative symptoms that affect some people with schizophrenia. Behaviours such as "catatonic posturing," "affective flattening" and a decrease in communication with others (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 276-277), are not evident in any of the audio or video tapes that I watched or listened to. Of course, if he suffered from periods of negative symptoms, then it is likely that he would not engage in tape–

[22] The Next Level was synonymous with Heaven, although for Heaven's Gate progression to this place involved evolutionary progress. Applewhite named this place also T.E.L.A.H—The Evolutionary Level Above Human.

making activities anyway. Additionally, if my argument of late onset schizophrenia is correct, then it is interesting to note that the DSM observes that for late onset cases, "The clinical presentation is more likely to include paranoid delusions and hallucinations, and *less likely to include disorganized and negative symptoms*" (American Psychiatric Association 1994: 281 [emphasis added]).[23] Moreover, if indeed Applewhite was paranoid, then the DSM concludes that for the paranoid type, "None of the following is prominent: disorganized speech, disorganized or catatonic behaviour, or flat or inappropriate affect" (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 287).[24]

I have outlined the major symptoms of schizophrenia in order to provide a framework in which to locate Applewhite's beliefs and attributions. The following sections of this chapter discuss in detail the Heaven's Gate belief system and some of the key ways that the body emerged as a locus of refinement and control. I discuss also the attributional processes that I argue took place not only at the leadership level but also among the members of the group. My incorporation of various facets of attribution theory in conjunction with my discussion of social theories on the body allows me to draw conclusions about the interrelationship between the group's belief system and associated practices. Where appropriate, I continue my discussion of some of the symptoms of schizophrenia to exemplify further the origin of some of Applewhite's ideas, fears, and obsessions. Social scientific research of the body

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[23] The DSM also notes that women are more likely than men to present with schizophrenia in later years. They are *more likely* to suffer from late onset, but men do still present also.

[24] Note that although I discuss Applewhite' tangentality in his conversation, he does not manifest the "word salad" effect that disorganized speech reveals. Still there may be some debate in my discussion of Applewhite as conforming to the paranoid subtype.

illustrates how the translation of these ideas functioned as a control mechanism within the group setting.

Heaven's Gate: The Location of the Body and the Role of Attribution

I The Emergent Belief System

Applewhite and Nettles attributed their meeting to divine intervention. Chapter 11 of the Book of Revelations became key to their belief that they had been "chosen" for a special purpose. According to that scripture, two heavenly messengers descend to Earth near the end of time, just prior to a two thousand year period of darkness on Earth. The purpose of "The Two," as they came to call themselves, was to gather human supporters who would follow them into the Kingdom of Heaven where they would enjoy eternal life as androgynous entities. The Two envisioned that their entrance into Heaven, or the "Next Level," would be facilitated by a spaceship, rather than on the cloud mentioned in the scripture (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 211). Thus, Applewhite perceived that God was the source of his revelations. This initial attribution (like subsequent ones he would make), was key to the development of the group. As Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) observed, patterns of attribution shape a person's pattern of subsequent motivation and behaviour. The rest of this chapter illustrates how this pattern of attribution and behaviour progressed for Applewhite, Nettles, and his dedicated followers.

The Two now had their mission set out before them, and central to the development of their belief were theories about what Next Level representatives required of humans to progress to the there. Initially, The Two proposed that to enter the Next Level one had to be in a living, physical body (Balch and Taylor, 2002:

209). There were conditions, however. Each individual hoping to advance to the Next Level had to abstain from material, filial, and sexual pleasures—members had to forgo belongings, family, friends, jobs, and sexual relationships. In addition, the group members avoided any other pursuits that were human in nature: listening to music, reading books, using drugs, and even discussing their pasts (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 213-214). Members abandoned many links to pre-group life including jewellery, facial hair, and clothing (Balch, 1995: 149). Applewhite believed that by shedding the signifiers of a human life, each member would progress beyond the bounds of Earth. In reality, Applewhite's delusions resulted not only in a self-imposed alienation from his body, but also, resulted in the alienation of each member from his or her body.

From the outset, Applewhite and Nettles ensured that the bodies of the group members reflected their differences from members of mainstream society. For them, the role of the body was clear. In order to transcend Earthly boundaries, the members had to alter the nature of their bodies. Applewhite and Nettles required members to engage in measures of bodily control so that such a transformation might take place. Because people's bodies contribute to the construction and reflection of social meaning (McGuire, 1990), the difference in appearance that the members achieved by adopting these measures helped them establish themselves as a group 'preparing to leave Earth.' Analogous to what Applewhite did, members' construction of a new self-identities contributed to the development of a group identity that represented a different social meaning from other groups in society. Thus, members' control of their bodies, and the reflection of this specific social meaning, helped to establish the

in-group/out-group dichotomy in which Heaven's Gate represented the saved, and the outside world symbolized those under the influence of Lucifer. Moreover, as Radley (1996) stated, people represent possible futures (for their bodies) by engaging in particular social interactions. Thus, the members of Heaven's Gate reflected upon their future through the behaviours in their present.

The Two travelled the United States to spread the word to anyone who would listen, about the necessity of discarding all characteristics related to humanity. Most of the people who joined them were young adults searching for meaning in their lives. Often, new recruits had dabbled in other ideological groups such as Scientology and Transcendental Meditation. Many recruits appeared more than willing to discard their Earthly possessions in order to pursue a non-human identity. Some gave up careers, marriages, and children, while others felt they were merely discarding an already wearisome existence (Balch and Taylor, 1976: 58-61). A characteristic common to many of the members (including Nettles herself) was a keen interest in New Age ideas and beliefs (Balch, 1995: 145). This background of "seeking" behaviour most likely facilitated the attribution process whereby members sought to find divine meaning in purportedly spiritual encounters. Applewhite claimed extraterrestrial knowledge, and his followers attributed that knowledge to divine communications.

II Refining the Belief System and the Role of the Body

Now that Applewhite and Nettles had a "flock" to watch over they renamed themselves Bo and Peep (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 213). The group adopted the name Human Individual Metamorphosis (H.I.M). It would be some time before they

acquired the name Heaven's Gate (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 211). At this juncture, ideas involving self-concept and the body became more fully developed. The ideas that Bo and Peep developed about bodily transformation are an expression of Applewhite's perceived loss of control over his own body. Typically, individuals with schizophrenia feel such a loss of control over either their minds or their bodies (American Psychiatric Association,1994: 275). Thus, Applewhite's elaborate beliefs about bodily transformation are a direct result of his fixation with his own body. Moreover, McKenna (1994) reports that extensive evidence exists of the commonality of bodily (somatic) hallucinations, and that these hallucinations usually pair with a detailed account explaining the bodily experiences (McKenna, 1994: 9). Applewhite's elaborate but strange description, therefore, of bodily transformation within the context of alien influence is not an uncommon phenomenon.

Having attributed bodily transformation to alien evolution and Divine design, Applewhite then engaged in another typical pattern of attribution that Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) described. He did not assess the source of his experiences correctly, then after making the attribution, he found "confirming evidence" for his beliefs. Importantly, as Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985), observe, context became key. Applewhite and Nettles established an environment in which Applewhite's beliefs (and attributions) were both accepted and encouraged. In the close-knit community setting that Applewhite established, members reinforced the attributions that Applewhite made. Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick found that the people in a social context exert a strong influence on one other, thus strengthening the attribution process and group cohesion. Also, in this way, members strengthen the in-group/out-

group dichotomy as a social control mechanism among themselves (in this case involving both bodily and psychological controls). Moreover, the members themselves accepted these attributions. They were, after all, the most available and meaningful attributions within the social context in which the members lived.

Bo and Peep maintained that Earth had been established as a garden where the Representatives had planted "seeds of consciousness" that incarnated and reincarnated through human form. Christ was sent to harvest individuals for Next Level entry, but had found that the seeds had not fully ripened. Applewhite was to fulfil Christ's mission with Nettles as his guide (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 211). They advised members that human bodies were merely transitory vehicles that people were to discard through a process of metamorphosis. Bo and Peep stressed that this change was truly physical in nature and was dependent on their abstinence from human indulgences. They presented this idea using the butterfly as a metaphor for change – just as the caterpillar sheds its chrysalis and emerges transformed, so too would the followers of H.I.M. (Balch and Taylor, 1976: 61).

III Moving On

At one time, Bo and Peep attracted several hundred members, but, the drop-out rate was fairly high and numbers dwindled to around one hundred by the end of 1975 (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 213-214). In 1976, the group stopped moving around and members began renting houses where Applewhite and Nettles set up "classrooms" in which to teach the "students" their developing belief system. With the establishment of residences, members now sought employment in order to help support the group. The group, however, kept contact with the outside world to a minimum as this new

phase unfolded. Bo and Peep adopted new names, Ti (Nettles) and Do (Applewhite), after the musical notes. They required that each member of the group also abandon his or her human name in favour of a new one (Balch and Taylor, 1976: 66). Name changing often occurs as a means of establishing a new family unit to replace abandoned family attachments, and changing names helps to create group loyalty (S. Balch, 1985: 322). Renaming one's self, and thus one's body, contributed to a change in the integral part of the social self that McGuire (1990) observes. A member who changed his or her name from his "outside world name" to his Heaven's Gate name contributed to a renegotiation of the social self, and contributed to one's own perception of self.

Over the ensuing years, the group moved several times, as some members left and others joined. But what developed from this time in the mid-1970s was a regime designed to help maintain group cohesion and loyalty. By establishing an intricate belief system and a highly regimented lifestyle, Ti and Do managed to create what would become a very dedicated group of followers. Indeed, some members became so dedicated that they eventually made the ultimate commitment, one that cost them their lives. When the classroom teachings began in 1976, Ti and Do assumed complete control over all the members' activities. The members or "crew" now lived in houses or "craft." These terms further entrenched the idea that space travel was possible. Importantly, Applewhite and Nettles established a power hierarchy in which the body was the "subject and object of power relations" (McGuire, 1990: 285). The body as a locus of control emerged also through a series of activities, some of which I discuss in the following sections.

IV Doctrinal Changes

Ti and Do replaced the initial metaphor for change, the butterfly, sometime in the early 1980s.[25] The new theory that Ti and Do proposed was that group members were not seeds planted on Earth, but were instead novice members of the Next Level. The idea was that members served apprenticeships on Earth before returning as fully-fledged members of the Kingdom of Heaven (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 217). This theory consolidated Ti and Do's ideas about the need to shed all human attributes including the body or "container." Do made further amendments to the group's beliefs following Ti's death in 1985. Originally, Ti and Do had claimed that to move to the Next Level one had to be physically alive. Now, Do assured the group that Ti had returned successfully to the Next Level without a physical body of any sort. Although this posed an alternative way to leave Earth, the plan was still to leave in a body, and by spacecraft (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 219).

The belief that the group members had originated from the Next Level served to strengthen the shared experience of the members (that they were of the same physical nature as Representatives, and sought to liberate themselves from their human incarnation). This shared experience gives credence to the argument that "We experience things done to our bodies as things done to ourselves" (McGuire, 1990: 284). For the members of Heaven's Gate, bodily transformation entailed self transformation. Thus the practices and experiences that they had adopted as humans were not representative (they believed) of their true self-identities (i.e. that of Next

[25] Although bodily transformation remained the key tenet of the Heaven's Gate belief system, the doctrinal details changed as Ti and Do judged necessary. Moreover, the doctrinal changes were not problematic to the followers. Certain of their leaders' contact with the supernatural realm, they attributed changes to the new revelations that Ti and Do received from the Next Level. Many of the audio tapes reveal their eagerness to learn new doctrines.

Level Representatives). The self-experience of each member as a 'container' rather than a functional human being resulted in a different experience of what most people consider typical human activities such as eating, drinking, and sex. As I illustrate, however, group members came to experience these commonplace activities as detrimental to their bodies and to their self-identities. Consequently, they had to eradicate or change the nature of such activities. Their rejection of some of these bodily experiences resulted in an ascetic lifestyle within the group.

The Asceticism of Heaven's Gate

I A Weberian Overview

Heaven's Gate embraced an ascetic tradition that appears to be a blend of the inner and other worldly ascetic traditions that Weber described. Just like the monastic ascetics, the members of the group withdrew from connections with the outside world as much as they could. The members of Heaven's Gate abstained from the roles that the majority of the American population engaged in, and by doing so, established a small, closed community that rejected the sexual mores of mainstream society.

Unlike the Catholic doctrine of *consilia evangelica*,[26] the group did not reject the possession of worldly goods. It appears that like the Protestant ascetics, work and the accumulation of goods was not necessarily a problem. Indeed, the members of Heaven's Gate operated an Internet web design company, and established themselves in attractive residences in upscale neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, Applewhite and his followers put their faith first. Working toward salvation through bodily abstinence

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[26] *consilia evangelica* (evangelical counsels) ". . . comprise of poverty, celibacy and obedience. . ." This doctrine encourages the rejection of worldly goods and promotes perfection as a goal that one achieves through love and deference (Ferm, 1945: 198).

and bodily control is reminiscent of the ascetic traditions that Weber described. Moreover, just as the Baptist sects instilled an extreme rejection of sexual and bodily gratification in their members, Applewhite enforced a complete renunciation of fleshly pleasures.

In the following two sections, I illustrate just how adamant Applewhite was in his rejection of sexuality, and in his adoption of subsequent bodily controls. In addition, I discuss later some of the extreme regimentation of bodily functions that occurred within the group. As Turner (1997) observed about Weber's conclusions, rationalization (of human activity) and human sexuality exist in conflict. To overcome this conflict, Applewhite instituted celibacy and encouraged castration. The "hostility toward sexuality" that Weber observed often is manifest in some religious settings because of asceticism and sexual control (Weber, 1922: 238), as is evident in Heaven's Gate. Thus, the bodies of the members came to represent their devotion to Applewhite and the Next Level representatives with whom he claimed to have contact. Just as members of the Baptists sects believed that their fervent devotion (as revealed through bodily abstinence) brought them closer to salvation, so too did the members of Heaven's Gate.

Some of the methods of ascetic sexual control that Applewhite advocated (and that he attributed to a divine masterplan), resulted in bodily control mechanisms that not only satisfied his desire for sexual abstinence, but also functioned to strengthen group cohesion. An inclusion of the insights of Coser (1974), and the current anthropological literature on sexual and familial control illustrates the nature of the group strengthening process. In addition, by observing McGuire's (1990) discussion

of self and body we can more readily understand the connection between the changing body and the strengthening of religious conviction.

II Sexuality as Sin, and the Body Problem

The audio and video tapes reveal, explicitly, Applewhite's views on sex and how he believed humans came to be tempted to adopt sexual relationships because of the nature of their bodies. He stated that our human bodies are "vehicles"[27] to be discarded like items of clothing. When we enter the Next Level we evolve into different physical beings—creatures that do not have the trappings of human bodies (Applewhite, 1992a).

Applewhite steadfastly advocated the need to free ourselves from our bodily "addictions." Although he mentioned problem behaviours such as over-eating, drinking, and smoking, he placed most emphasis on sexual relationships. By calling such human behaviours "addictions," he pathologized them. Indeed, to Applewhite nearly all human endeavours were problems to be overcome—in the same breath he classified both martini drinking and family attachments as things that we are "hooked" on (Applewhite, 1992a). According to Applewhite, the body that we reside in is the key hindrance to our progress, and he argued that it exists as a continual source of temptation. He claimed that the body has its own sets of impulses and desires that are quite separate from our true self. He equated the body to being "like a kind of living computer that never quite shuts down" (Applewhite, 1992c). As Balch and Taylor (2002: 225) point out, "Members came to see themselves as nonhuman

[27] In both the video and audio recordings, and on the Heaven's Gate website, Do referred to the human body as either a "vehicle" or a "container." Do appeared to prefer "vehicle" and often corrected himself during classroom sessions if he used the term "body" to describe the human form. I use "body" and "vehicle" interchangeably throughout this chapter.

souls who were merely occupying temporary life-support systems while on a mission to an alien world."

Applewhite attributed the seductive nature of the body to Lucifer's influence. Following Lucifer's fall from God's Kingdom, according to Applewhite, he made it his goal to continually put temptation in our path. In fact, Lucifer is the main protagonist in human downfall. Scheflen (1981) comments that schizophrenics often explain personal experience by identifying the root of the problem. He wrote:

> He [the schizophrenic] thinks like a classic Aristotelian, believing that some concrete entity, some person or thing, is the cause of it all, and imaging unseen forces that govern his experience. In the paranoid instance, he 'discovers' who his enemy is, and he comes to 'know' just what forces or influences are being used against him (Scheflen, 1981; 94).

For Applewhite, the enemy was Luci. Applewhite perceived Lucifer as the central source of problems both on Earth as a whole, and for each individual specifically. Moreover, he believed that Lucifer could win over members if they were not fully committed to transformation. These "potentially discouraging events" (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975), that Applewhite, and hence the group members, attributed to the evil forces of the supernatural realm, strengthened their resolve and belief in their own doctrines. Each renewal of faith cemented group cohesion and contributed to their insularity.

Applewhite argued that the worst possible outcome of temptation is not just sexual intimacy itself, but the idea of love. Love, he said, is a concept created by

Lucifer that tempts us to engage in sexual activity, and sex itself is a drug to which we are addicted. He went as far as to argue that we are "possessed" by our sexuality. As long as we engage in sexual activity, we cannot see clearly, and therefore, are not yet ready to enter the Next Level (Applewhite, 1992c). Again, Applewhite clearly demonstrated a common symptom of schizophrenia—delusions of a sexual nature. McKenna (1994) reports that sexual delusions are manifested in a variety of ways, one of them being a belief "that one's sex is changing" (McKenna, 1994: 4). Applewhite taught his followers that Next Level Representatives are genderless beings. In accordance with Applewhite's feelings regarding sex, he designed the sleeping quarters to prevent sexual excitement—men and women slept separately at all times and slept fully covered by their bedclothes (Balch & Taylor, 2002: 215).

These beliefs clearly underscore Ti and Do's justifications of celibacy for group members. While sexual abstinence as a core group tenet is evidence of Applewhite's own dysfunctional beliefs about sex, another avenue of exploration exists. As leaders of a group, Ti and Do used strategies to maintain group cohesion. As Coser (1974) and others have observed, leaders sometimes use celibacy as a means of control in group settings (Qirko, 2002: 322). Often, the leaders manipulate celibacy by encouraging group members to adopt a similar physical appearance. When we live with people who look physically similar to us, we identify these people as family members and thus we avoid initiating sexual behaviour with them (Qirko, 2002: 323). According to Stephen Balch, this process of biological "mimicry" encourages members to redirect the types of feelings reserved for actual family members to the group instead (S. Balch, 1985: 325). Individuals mimic implicit kin cues in a number

of ways. First, the group leaders keep members in close contact with one another in a manner characteristic of family units. Second, group members look and sound alike by adopting similar hairstyles, clothing, symbols, speech patterns, and gestures. Lastly, members break all ties with their natural family unit (Qirko, 2002: 323-324).

According to this perspective, two key benefits exist for groups that establish celibacy. First, celibate members do not establish the types of relationships that result in marriage and families (i.e. sexual relationships). As a result, they do not direct time and energy toward their own family unit. Instead, members direct resources inwardly to the group. Second, celibate members typically turn their financial resources over to the group because they have no biological dependents (Qirko, 2002: 323).

Additionally, families generally afford access to alternative social contacts that may have beliefs and norms running counter to those of the group. Critically, they present the individual with connections to the outside world (S. Balch, 1985: 316). Essentially, sexual and filial commitments outside of the group undermine the absolute loyalty required of group members to the group (Coser, 1974: 136). Consequently, by creating a new family, one that was largely self-contained, Applewhite and Nettles succeeded in preventing the type of relationships (sexual and exogenous) that might have threatened group cohesion. To counter the threat of extra-group relationships, they established the group as the centre of each member's life, in effect establishing new and more important relationships for each person. Likewise, Coser (1974) observed that the "sacerdotal celibacy" that the Catholic Church instituted over its priests functioned not only to control them, but also to

establish commitment directed solely to the church. Priests with wives and children would have conflict of interests, and perhaps not put the church first. Quite simply, families provide too much competition. The group as family is a frequent phenomenon, and Coser wrote in his analysis of utopian communities ". . . one can find in most of them the witting or unwitting exaltation of the community as the one true family" (Coser, 1974: 143).

This model of celibacy is applicable to the members of Heaven's Gate. Applewhite and Nettles established a family-style living environment when the group began renting houses in which members lived together. The members' androgynous appearance strengthened the family unit. The members of Heaven's Gate looked alike—so much so in fact, that upon discovery of their bodies following their mass suicide in 1997, the police initially identified all the members as male (*Washington Post,* 1997). Ti and Do believed that life in the Kingdom of Heaven is genderless, and that Representatives of the Next Level are androgynous beings. Preparations for this type of existence, therefore, had to begin on Earth. Several years after Nettles's death, Applewhite claimed that she had "overcome" her female form before passing on (Applewhite, 1992b). The body of each member symbolized each one's understanding of his or her role on Earth, and as such reflected the social meaning that each member had internalized. The members of Heaven's Gate shaped their bodies to symbolize their future purpose–that of Next Level Representatives.

Applewhite's inability to accept his attraction to men meant that he chose sexual abstinence for himself, and dictated it for others. Whether he anticipated the benefits of increased group strength and cohesion at the outset is not certain, but surely he

must have recognized the effect with time. Celibacy requires discipline and self-denial, but, for those who left the group, a return to a full sex life was an option. Castration is, however, a permanent commitment. The autopsy reports of the suicide victims show that eight of the members had been physically castrated, including Applewhite himself (Perkins & Jackson, 1997: 5, 91). Apparently, Applewhite did not consider celibacy a robust enough deterrent against sexual temptation for some members. Indeed, Applewhite maintained that while there are still hormones circulating within one's body, temptation would continue to be a problem. He viewed sex as a potent drug that our physical systems had to battle continually (Applewhite, 1992c).

Although Applewhite acknowledged that each human has been born from the sexual union of his and her parents, he argued that sexuality is a condition that people can overcome. He reasoned that Adam and Eve need not have had sex in order for the world to become populated. He believed that God had placed them on Earth with the *potential* to procreate (i.e. they had reproductive organs). Applewhite maintained that God's real intention, however, was to create people continually himself, thus making sex redundant. Adam and Eve's sin destroyed this plan. Furthermore, Applewhite looked to Christ as the embodiment of purity. If Jesus could live a sexless life, then those preparing for the Next Level could too (Applewhite, 1992c). Applewhite's dysfunctional beliefs about the nature of sexuality coupled with his interpretation of Biblical scripture had turned the body into an object of ruin. For him it had become the enemy and it had to be defeated.

By recognizing that people "know" their world through their bodies, we can better understand the different realities that exist for different people (McGuire, 1990: 286). In Applewhite's case schizophrenic delusions altered his concept of body, and his reality reflected this distortion. Convinced that Applewhite provided them with the key to eternal life, the members attributed his knowledge of what was good and bad for their bodies to the will of the Next Level (a place that they so desperately sought). Furthermore, by keeping the group isolated from friends, family, and mainstream society in an atmosphere that fostered Applewhite's absolute authority, members accepted Applewhite's reality through a process of religious obedience (Davis, 2000). The group, therefore, readily accepted Applewhite's philosophy of sexuality.

III The Strange Case of "Brother David"

While celibacy is a requirement for representatives of some traditional religions, most notably for priests in the Roman Catholic Church, castration is not. Indeed, the Catholic Church is completely opposed to castration as a signifier of religious devotion (Roberts, Hollifield, and McCarty, 1998: 418). Historical accounts reveal, however, that castration has emerged on occasion as a symbol of holy devotion. Some pagan priests, for example, avoided sexual temptation by castrating themselves (Ranke-Heinemann, 1990: 99). Furthermore, prior to the 16th century, Christian churches castrated some young boys in preparation for their roles as bureaucrats, servants, and singers (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 44). The Russian Christian sect, the Skoptsy (that emerged during the 18th century and flourished until the 2oth century), engaged in castration as a means of salvation (Englestein, 1999: 17-18).

For some members of Heaven's Gate, castration symbolized their loyalty to the goals of the group. In 1995 a member of Heaven's Gate approached a private urology clinic seeking an orchiectomy (castration). His doctor referred him for psychiatric evaluation to determine his eligibility for the procedure. He gave his psychiatrist permission to publish his case, feeling that others might benefit from his experience. The story of "Brother David," as he identified himself, helps us to understand Ti and Do's beliefs about the sexual nature of the human body.

Roberts and her colleagues (1998) report that Brother David's desire to be castrated stemmed from his belief that his sexuality interfered with his commitment to his faith. He did not identify himself as a member of Heaven's Gate, but instead said that he was a monk with the "Ascension Monastery." Brother David claimed that his relationship with God was not complete because he could not fully overcome his sexual urges. He referred to his body as a "tool," and said that his testicles were "obsolete." Feelings of guilt and shame also haunted him. Like Applewhite, Brother David had lived an openly gay life during his young adulthood but he had begun to question his sexuality when in his mid-twenties. At this point he had met two "monks" who introduced him to their religion. Of course, the "monks" were members of Heaven's Gate, and Ti and Do had taught Brother David to equate his body as a "tool" and as a vehicle.

Brother David tried to bolster his application for the operation by introducing his psychiatrist to Brother Thomas. Brother Thomas already had had an orchiectomy performed and he spoke enthusiastically of its effectiveness. Following extensive psychiatric evaluation at the clinic, Brother David's attending psychiatrist concluded

that his request for the procedure, though unusual, was not based on any evident psychosis or known psychiatric disorder. He noted however, that Brother David had undergone periods of depression. Brother David's urologist declined to carry out the operation (Roberts et. al., 1998: 415-420).

While the man who presented himself as Brother David may have developed problems coming to terms with his own sexuality without encountering Ti and Do's group, it seems certain that the group's influence magnified his difficulties. Brother David's assertion that the sexual nature of his body interfered with his relationship to God relates directly to Ti and Do's beliefs. Applewhite insisted that only when people are free from their sexual desires can they enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Furthermore, his discussion on the "problem" of hormones seems an allusion to the necessity of castration (Applewhite, 1992c). Clearly, Brother David's early sexual experiences were similar to Applewhite's. Moreover, Brother David expressed an early desire to join the priesthood, just as Applewhite had wanted to become a minister.

As celibacy is an instrument of control in some group settings, so too is castration. Stephen Balch (1985) describes the use of both from antiquity to the modern period as a way of securing loyalty. The purpose of these methods of control has been to rid the person of family connections and ensure that the individual did not have access to beliefs that might be at odds with those of the group. He notes also, that the group creates a substitute family environment in order to strengthen this severance (S. Balch, 1985). Englestein's account of the Skoptsy corroborates this

argument. She wrote of the Skoptsy community: "Shared stigma held them together, marked bodies made defection unlikely,..." (Englestein, 1999: 94).

Radley (1996) pointed to the embodied experience as representative of our social situation (Radley, 1996: 561). The denial of sexuality within the social world of Heaven's Gate represented the battle for transformation, the yearning for what possibilities (Radley, 1996: 559) might lie in the future; pointing to what Radley identified as "transcendence on the one hand, immediacy on the other" (Radley, 1996: 564). In this way, corporeal *realities* and *opportunities* fused for Applewhite's followers.

Along similar lines, McGuire (1990), reminds us that different parts of the body can contribute to how we view our self identity and its link to our social reality (McGuire, 1990: 288). The denial of the sexual body involved a denial of the sexual self. The members believed that their bodies were not meant to be sexual. By abstaining from sexual activity, the members redefined their bodies in yet another way that represented their denial of humanness. For the members of Heaven's Gate, their social reality was one that did not require, nor indeed allow, sexual bodies.

More Body Work

Although Applewhite and Nettles placed a great deal of emphasis on the sexual nature of the human body, from the early days of the group's development they also formed other ideas about it. These ideas resulted in additional rules governing the body's treatment.

From the outset, one of the key beliefs of the group was that members would shed their human bodies, and in the process evolve into Next Level beings.

Applewhite described this process as being initiated by the appearance of an "implant" within a person that Representatives from the Next Level placed within him or her.[28] The implant results in a phase in the person's life called "Awakening" (Applewhite, 1992c). According to Applewhite the "Awakening" process initiates a physical, biochemical change in the body. This transformation is what Applewhite and Nettles used the butterfly metaphor to describe (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 212). Ti and Do informed group members that they must be prepared for the transformational process. They advised members to make themselves as presentable as possible to Next Level members (Applewhite and Nettles, 1982a).

The preparations for the Next Level took many forms. As parental figures, Applewhite and Nettles held positions of power and authority. By controlling what members could eat and drink, when they could sleep, what they could discuss, and where they could work, Applewhite and Nettles removed from people the power to decide how to live in their own bodies.

I The Body and Food

Ti and Do controlled everyday activities such as eating. At one time while the group was still on the road, members lived on a specially designed drink consisting of lemonade, maple syrup, and cayenne pepper. Ti and Do designed the drink to clear members' bodies' of junk food. This diet prevailed for three months (Miller, 1997: 32). Later, during a period of time known as "Central," members ate two meals a day called "lab experiments" (*Time*, 1997: 41). Do explained to members that in order

[28] This belief existed prior to Applewhite and Nettles's announcement that group members actually were novice Representatives engaging in an Earthly experience. Often, it is difficult to keep up with Applewhite's changing beliefs. The classroom sessions reveal many instances where Applewhite mixes old doctrine with new.

to gain access to the Next Level it was necessary that they engage in activities that might adversely affect their vehicles. He stated, for example, that members had to be "broken down" to a point where they no longer cared what their bodies consumed, so that they could then learn afresh what food to eat as Next Level members (Applewhite, 1982b). McGuire (1990) does not discuss dietary control in her account of power relations, but it seems appropriate that this type of control is assigned to this category.

II The Regimented Body

Ti and Do designed a practice named "Central," initiated in 1976, and reintroduced periodically over the years, to prepare members for life aboard the spacecraft that was to take them to the Kingdom of Heaven. It also functioned, however, as a gruelling control mechanism over each person's body. The two leaders designed Central around a strict regimentation of duties. Members had to turn up at a specific location in the house every eleven minutes throughout the day and then ask themselves inwardly how they could better serve the group. Ti and Do designed this duty to help rid members of their humanness, and for this reason many members embraced the procedure (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 215-216).

Former group member Rio DiAngelo shared some of his experiences with *Newsweek* shortly after the suicides. He described how the physically exhausting nature of Central resulted in its abandonment. DiAngelo recalled that while Central was operational, members were keyed up constantly, expecting that a spaceship might arrive at any moment to take them to the Next Level. This sense of immediacy, he explained, helped members to shed their human behaviours (Miller, 1997: 34).

Moreover, this type of extreme regimentation was a recurring theme for the group. Robert Balch describes how members literally had to account for every minute of their days from early each morning until late at night (R. Balch, 1995: 157). Central created bodily experience on both the individual and group level. Each member was privy to knowledge that he or she was preparing for an exploration into space. This knowledge set each individual apart from other members of society while bonding each individual more closely with other members of the group.

Ti and Do instituted numerous other measures in an attempt to free group members from their humanness. Robert Balch (1995) discusses several of these measures, which helped to control members and their bodies. "Smooth whirlwind," was an exercise whereby every month or so each member paired off with a new member. Applewhite and Nettles claimed that by doing this, members acclimatized to the process of change. "A tone" kept human thought processes at bay: "Members would put a vibrating tuning fork against their temples and concentrate on the note it produced, learning to focus on the sound while eating, washing cars, doing laundry, and taking care of other chores" (R. Balch, 1995: 155). Members refrained from talking during "tomb time," a practice that served to reduce the amount of verbal communication within the group, since the leaders believed that telepathy was the next evolutionary step (R. Balch, 1995: 154). Perhaps the most powerful of all measures taken was "eyes." This procedure involved members observing each other's behaviours to ensure that each person was conforming to the group's newly established norms (R. Balch, 1995: 158).

Later, members monitored each other's behaviours when Applewhite assigned each a "check partner." Partners were responsible for ensuring faithful adherence to group doctrine, and had to expose those members who were guilty of infractions (Applewhite and Nettles, 1984c). Each of these procedures contributed to the regimentation and control of members' bodies. Applewhite and Nettles instituted these practices reputedly to help the members overcome their human forms, but at the core each activity heightened intra-group control through beliefs and behaviours originating from Applewhite's own somatic issues.

The behaviours that the members engaged in seem to echo Radley's (1996) discussion of the "reordering of cultural artefacts" (Radley, 1996: 565). The bodies of the members of Heaven's Gate existed not only as subjects for possible change and transcendence, but also within a setting in which they renegotiated everyday activities and objects. Thus, as Applewhite's followers prepared for their futures, they renegotiated their present.

III Weak Bodies are Human Bodies

While many of the behaviours adopted to help overcome the humanness of the body were based on specific tasks and commands, others were more subtle but just as effective at convincing group members that bodily transformation was not only desirable but also attainable. Many of Ti and Do's classroom lectures discussed methods whereby each individual could monitor his or her own body on a more personal and reflective basis. Ti and Do advised members to meditate at least three times daily in order to facilitate this process of body reflection. As Do declared joyfully, "Ti and I would be happy if we could do it [meditate] at least twenty-three-

and-a-half hours per day" (Applewhite and Nettles, 1982a). While meditating, students were to give their vehicles' gentle commands to help their vehicles relax. According to Applewhite, the members had to dispel all negative thoughts because they were responsible for cellular decay. Vehicular decay, he asserted, caused the mind to be pushed away from the body. He believed that by attaining a body healthy by Next Level standards, all decay would vanish, and the mind and body would become one. Applewhite and Nettles taught the members that they already had Next level minds, and that problems arose because of the incompatibility between their advanced minds and their human bodies (Applewhite and Nettles, 1984a and b).

Any sign of sickness (i.e. human "weakness") supposedly created conflict that prevented Next Level progress. Do taught specific visualization techniques—he told students to visualize a phosphorent, glowing ball of light travelling through their vehicles, repairing as it moved. Do explained that for him, this process occurred in an examination room, where he asked representatives of the Next Level to examine his vehicle more thoroughly than he could. He also asked them for a prescription for corrections. Do told students that they needed to "wipe out that old nasty humanness" (Applewhite and Nettles, 1982b). Applewhite's obsession with the inadequacy of human bodies is understandable when one looks at the literature on schizophrenia. Bodily delusions sometimes manifest themselves in terms of ". . . an individual's belief that his body is unhealthy, rotten or diseased . . ." (McKenna, 1994: 3).

Applewhite's recommendations for vehicular maintenance are explicable in light of his fixation with his body. Scheflen (1981) identified that common to schizophrenics

". . .is a preoccupation with self-evaluations, including past failures, reviews of self and bodily image, and dreams of imaginary or wished-for accomplishments." (Scheflen, 1981; 94). Applewhite's need for control of his body, and the accompanying hallucinations he experienced, reveal this continual self-review process. He instructed members to think of the perfection of their bodies, not as humans but as Next Level Representatives. He told them to mentally direct the healthy cells to overpower the unhealthy ones. Furthermore, he advised the students to engage in this process of mental manipulation throughout the day, not just during meditation (Applewhite and Nettles, 1982c).

Applewhite dreamed for the transformation of the group from human beings burdened with unwieldy bodies to ideal entities free from somatic concerns. He attributed the delusions that he experienced to extra-terrestrial and Divine command. The group members, who believed Applewhite was "the chosen one" who would lead them to salvation, likewise attributed Applewhite's commands and prophecies to the supernatural realm. Over time, this process of attribution became easier for the members because they were in a social context that limited their options for understanding their social world. Thus, the attributions that they made, were indeed the most parsimonious, and fit easily into the meaning system that they had adopted (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985: 2-3). Moreover, as Proudfoot and Shaver

(1975) originally noted, the relationship between attribution and subsequent motivation becomes a *pattern* of attribution and motivation.

Looking for Signs

Subsequent to Ti's death, Do patiently waited for a "sign" from her that it was time for the group to move to the Next Level. He also claimed that he maintained regular contact with her. Though many of the group's rules had become more relaxed by the mid- 1990s, the group itself became more insular. In 1995, the members moved to a remote area of New Mexico where they began building "earth ships" erected from soil and tires. The venture was a failure, however, and many of the members did not want to live in such uncomfortable conditions. Their all-too-human bodies were aging. In fact, Do's health was starting to fail, and more often he believed that the time had come to exit the planet. Only as the group came to accept that the time to journey to the Next Level was approaching, did they adopt the name Heaven's Gate (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 219-221).

The group also began thinking of new ways to move on to Heaven. Since Ti's death the group realized that they required neither a physical body nor a spaceship for transport. Death as a mode of transport became an option, and the group began considering suicide. From the group's perspective, death was removed from the body—only the vehicle remains, while the true self would move on to the Next Level. When, in 1997, the Hale-Bopp comet became headline news, Do became convinced that Ti was returning to Earth in a spaceship concealed in its tail. Though Do failed to observe the spaceship with a telescope, he still believed that Hale-Bopp was the sign that he had been waiting for (*New Yorker*, 1997: 31) his "potentially

discouraging" event (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 327) did not deter the group from their plans. Thus, the members prepared for what they called their "final exit" (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 221-224).

Conclusion

Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Lu Nettles created a belief system in which they identified the body as separate from self. Not only did they consider the body an encumbrance, but also it came to symbolize wickedness and immorality. The individual members of Heaven's Gate fought a daily battle with their bodies, and their experiences of self came to be extremely dysfunctional. Despite over twenty-five years without bodily transformation materializing, Applewhite continued to believe that change was possible. The group just had to work harder to make it happen.

McGuire's (1990) discussion of key aspects of the body helped to frame my analysis of the group. The body of each member of Heaven's Gate existed as part of a social world that in turn shaped each member's notions of selfhood. As physical substance, each member also experienced a wide range of environmental stimuli. These conditions of human existence created a unique experience for each member, and that experience was reflected by both the bodily self-expression of each member, and by the power relations that existed between the leaders and the followers. The members of Heaven's Gate created their own social environment in which they operated according to their own rules. At the same time, Applewhite and Nettles allowed little contact with the outside world. As a result, the bodies of the members reflected the meanings established within their own microcosm. The adoption of similar physical appearances indicated their "family" status. Applewhite and Nettles

assumed the parental role and members became their children—as a result a power relationship developed.

When listening to the audio tapes I often found myself thinking that Applewhite and Nettles sounded like genuinely concerned parents wanting only the best for their children. Indeed, Balch and Taylor observed that Applewhite and Nettles encouraged members wanting to leave to do so, and gave those who departed their sincere blessings (Balch and Taylor, 2002: 216). This streamlining process served to strengthen the group by keeping only those people prepared to make a long-term commitment. From those who remained, Applewhite and Nettles required a full commitment to both belief system and doctrine. They made it extremely clear during classroom sessions that their beliefs were the only true ones, and that there was no room for doubt. They considered other religions misguided and under the control of Satan, no matter how well intentioned they appeared. Applewhite and Nettles were likeable people, and I feel compassion for them. But, for all their seemingly well-meaning statements, at the heart of the Heaven's Gate belief system existed two very troubled individuals who shaped a faith meted out in absolute terms – a faith that culminated in the death of thirty-nine people.

Attribution theory helped me to understand how Applewhite and his followers came to accept and rationalize their beliefs and behaviours. The patterns of attribution that emerged and their incorporation into the group bolstered the commitment of each member to the group. Having faith that Applewhite would take them beyond the limits of Earthly existence, members attributed his word to his connection to the cosmic realm. Given the members' great desire (and need) for a

transcendental experience, it is easier to understand the pattern of attribution that emerged.

The manifestation of Applewhite's schizophrenic symptoms in his already troubled psyche created a vast delusional landscape in which he situated himself and his followers. I have shown how the complex nature of schizophrenia allows for the fabrication of an elaborate belief system in which the protagonist is certain he knows the "truth." By the time of the suicides in 1997, thirty-eight other people believed in Applewhite's version of it. Despite this compelling evidence that the psychology of a powerful individual can influence the actions of a group, some researchers argue that this relationship is unlikely to occur. In their analysis of violence and religion, Gordon Melton and David Bromley wrote, "Attributing organizational outcomes to the personality of a single individual, even a powerful charismatic leader, usually camouflages much more complex social dynamics" (Melton and Bromley, 2002: 47). While I do not consider that a simple cause-and-effect relationship exists between an individual's personality and group behaviour, *in at least some* instances the psychological makeup of the leader is a powerful variable in group dynamics. As Melton and Bromley (2002) indicate, other social factors contribute to group behavior. These factors operate, however, in conjunction with the leader's personality. The biopsychosocial profile of Applewhite coupled with the social environment in which the group existed, exemplifies this interaction.

Chapter Four: The Children of God [29]

Introduction

The Children of God emerged during the late 1960s under the leadership of David Berg. The group offered a radically different platform from which to worship and spread the word of God. Rather than provide a traditional image of Jesus, Berg offered a revolutionary one that appealed to the disenchanted youth of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Kent, 2001: 146-149). From Berg's reinterpretation of Christianity emerged a belief system that not only condoned, but actively encouraged sexual promiscuity among adults, among children, and most alarmingly, among adults and children.

I maintain that the heavy emphasis that Berg placed upon sexual relationships contributed to the adoption of specific norms for the human body. I posit that these new body norms served as a method of control within the group. As Berg legitimated each of the sexual practices (which I assume were not practices that members typically engaged in prior to joining the Children of God), he normalised certain beliefs about the body. The practices included "…'flirty fishing,' incest (according to some close family members), and pedophilia" (Kent, 1994: 141).

I shall argue that the practice of "Flirty Fishing" in which female members prostituted themselves as a method of proselytization resulted in members viewing women's bodies as recruitment tools and as an appropriate way in which to use one's body in the name of Jesus and God. Thus, prostitution became an acceptable and indeed expected way for women to use their bodies, and (as I argue) one facet of

[29] The group started as "Teens for Christ," became "The Children of God" and then "The Family." I refer to the group as the Children of God (COG) throughout.

control that Berg maintained over his female followers. Moreover, women had to make their bodies freely available to Berg and to other males in the group at any time. Indeed, Berg promoted the total subjugation of women's bodies, and described their duties and obligations to men in sexual terms. More controversially, Berg decreed that adults should encourage children to engage in sexual activity with one another from an early age, and that adults engage in sexual relations with both their own children and other children (Kent, 1994). Unlike Heaven's Gate, which required celibacy of its members, the Children of God did not follow in that ascetic tradition of abstinence, but rather turned it on its head. According to Berg, an abundance of sex was the way to bring one closer to God. The closed environment of this high-demand group that espoused an end-time prophecy spawned an in-group/out-group dichotomy that facilitated a legacy of bodily abuse and control.

I do not (and cannot) address all the issues that scholars (and others) have raised over the years regarding the group's lifestyle, activities, doctrines, and practices. Given the nature of the debates on many of these issues, the truth may lie somewhere between the polarized approaches. I intend to analyze only those aspects that appear (to me) to locate women's and children's bodies as loci of control. Thus, I do not argue that every and all aspects of the Children of God's way of life and belief system were violent and subversive, but I do argue that specific written doctrines and their concordant practices were not only problematic, but also at times both abusive and illegal. Although many people have reported positive experiences within the group, many others have reported times of fear, coercion, sexual misconduct, prostitution, rape, and child abuse that academics must not ignore.

Moreover, these abuses did not occur in the same way that they do in the rest of society (that is, as acknowledged criminal acts), but instead they occurred as part of an encouraged, sanctioned, and even written doctrinal system.

In England in 1995, in a court presided over by Judge Ward, several adults described their childhood experiences in the COG. They described in detail many of the sexual abuses that they endured including forced oral sex, forced masturbation, rape, and other coerced sexual encounters (Ward, 1995: 91-97). In his concluding remarks, Judge Ward stated that "widespread sexual abuse of young children and teenagers" had occurred within the group, and that these abuses had occurred at a rate higher than that of mainstream society (Ward, 1995: 111). Moreover, he concluded that Berg had "made them [children] objects of sex" (Ward, 1995: 112).

As such, my own analysis of these particular practices is critical of David Berg and his organization of the group. He not only condoned such behaviour but also instituted them as religious practice, and as such (I argue) placed children's and women's bodies as loci of control.

Literature Review

The Children of God (COG, hereafter) has engendered an enormous amount of research, investigation, and debate for over thirty years. The emergence of the so-called "counter-cult" movement occurred due largely as a response to the group's popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The media reported incidents of problems and abuses within the group, and academic research soon followed. As with many new religious movements and ideological groups, the COG resulted in a polarization of academic attitudes toward it. The so-called "counter-cultists" wrote

(and continue to write) about issues such as the authoritarian leadership of the group; the nature of sexual relationships within the group; and discipline and control regimes. The so-called "cult-apologists," however, tend to analyse the group in terms of its attempts to provide alternative ways of living and worshipping. These academics either reduce the impact of sexual misconduct and abuse in the group, looking towards changes since the worst abuses occurred, or whitewash the events entirely. Moreover, the cult apologists typically temper the problems within the group (even when they acknowledge the extremity of them), with religious dialogue. In this way, the apologists attempt to negate the impact of the concerns that the "counter-cultists" raise.

Sociologist Roy Wallis examined COG in several articles, exploring the organizational structure of the group (1981) and the role that sexuality and relational bonds played in the conversion and maintenance of new recruits (1983). Wallis was one of the first academics to address some of the dynamics of the COG. He identified Berg's use of women to win over new recruits not only for their souls, but also for their money (Wallis, 1981: 107-108; 1983:4). Moreover, Wallis identified, "In due time even the pretence that they were not offering sex for money was largely dropped, as the girls were encouraged to 'make it pay,' to secure jobs in escort agencies, or to set themselves up as call-girls" (Wallis, 1983: 4). Wallis's work foreshadowed a substantial body of research into the group.

David Van Zandt wrote one of the first academic books on the group. In *Living In The Children of God* (1991), Van Zandt described his experiences in the group as both participant observer, and as covert participant observer. Van Zandt provided a

comprehensive and well-documented account of the COG. He discussed many facets of the group including, but not limited to: the group's end-time ideological system; the nature and purpose of the "Mo Letters;"[30] the group's expansion; the organizational structure of the group; control of information; witnessing; and socialization into it. His research provided a thorough overall account of the group, and he described and analyzed many of its beliefs and activities from an unbiased academic position.[31] Critically, in the postscript to the book, he addressed child sexual abuse and the treatment of women within the group. He neither sensationalized nor whitewashed the problems of abuse—he merely documented them (Van Zandt, 1991: 170-171).

Taking a different approach to the COG, sociologist Stephen Kent has written several critical accounts about the group, paying specific attention to leadership and control issues. First, he examined the psychosexual history of David Berg (Kent, 1994a), exploring Berg's childhood sexual experiences and the translation of them into his religious ideology. Second, Kent (1994b) observed the attributions that group members made in terms of authority, and how these attributions facilitated members' acceptance of controls and punishments. This article established the role

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[30] The *Mo Letters* were Berg's means of communication with members. More than that, they functioned as a "social control device," (Van Zandt, 1991: 20) by allowing Berg to distribute his ideological goals, beliefs, and orders to each of the COG colonies. Thus, the letters channeled his "indirect charismatic authority (Van Zandt, 1991: 55). Berg dictated most of the letters to his lover, Maria, and then sent them to the COG editors and artists for illustration, publication, and distribution. The subject matter of the letters varies considerably. Topics include sex, religion, God, Jesus, politics, end-time prophecy, the United States, childcare, clothing, witnessing, music, films etc. In the letters, Berg asserted his absolute authority and even rewrote many scriptures in order to legitimate his own views (Van Zandt, 1991: 21-22). Berg had collected letters published in volumes. There are over two thousand five hundred letters in total, some five hundred of which discuss Flirty Fishing. Berg used a lot of emphasis in the form of capitalization and underlining of words in his publications. My reproduction of text from the letters follows the exact format that he used in each case.

[31] By unbiased, I mean that his book is neither clearly apologetic nor clearly counter-cultist in its approach.

of obedience to doctrine by group members, and as such supplements my understanding not only of the attributional processes that members made to Berg's directives, but more specifically to those involving child sexuality and the subjugation of women within the group. As Kent articulates, "The theological misattribution system disempowered people by removing any sense of self-worth, critical doubts, or self control, contrary to the attribution pattern that psychologists of religion usually predict for normative or mainstream religion" (Kent, 1994b: 32). Along theses lines, one can more readily understand the compliance of women within the group. Moreover, Kent identified that the women of the group experience "double disempowerment." That is, not only are they part of a group that as a whole submits to authority, but also, they are subservient to the men within the group (Kent, 1994b: 41). Finally, Kent (2001) discussed the emergence of the Children of God within the context of the shift from social and political protest movements of the 1960s to the proliferation of new religious movements that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s (Kent, 2001).

Not only have the COG attracted the attention of sociologists, but also researchers from other arenas. Anthropologist Ruth Wangerin wrote a rather cursory account of women's roles in the COG (1982). She alluded to some problems, but mostly framed the group as benign and misunderstood. As a result, her approach was rather apologetic and did not attempt any discussion beyond surface representations. Certainly, she did not discuss or analyse the women within an abusive context.

In her book, *The Children of God: A Make-Believe Revolution?* Wangerin (1993) was more critical of some of the group's practices and questions why the

group never realized some of its original ideals. In terms of her discussion of women and children, she examined some of the problems. For example, she mentioned that women were sometimes "pressured" into marrying men that they did not like or love (Wangerin, 1993: 104). Moreover, because "COG women were expected to provide sex for men in the colony and for influential contacts outside, some male disciples came home just for meals and sex" (Wangerin, 1993: 97). Wangerin however, appears, to make light of the child abuse within the group, downplaying the analyses of ex-members and of other academics (Wangerin, 1982: 57; 167). She even commented, "Mo [Berg] not only *showed his high opinion of teenagers by sleeping with them*, a practice many people have criticized, but more importantly, *Mo used teenagers as leaders and assistant ideologists*" (Wangerin, 1993: 175-176 [emphasis added]). Thus, the very attributes that Wangerin praises are ones that, I argue, were abusive and controlling.

Religious studies researchers James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (1994) edited a volume of collected essays on COG. An array of issues are explored, including the sexual mores of the group; child abuse allegations; second generation membership; the perceived victimization of the COG by "counter-cultists;" and the group as it exists in the 1990s. In the introduction to the book, Lewis stated, ". . . I can assert with some confidence that The Family does *not* abuse its children" (Lewis, 1994: vii [emphasis in the original]).

Some of the articles in the Melton and Lewis anthology express absolute outrage at government agencies for investigating child abuse (Oliver, 1994), while others accept that there were "problems," but then fail to address the consequences of them

(Melton, 1994). Still others reject outright the testimony of ex-members. For example, sociologist Susan Palmer's academic critique of Deborah Davis's account is that it is a "horrid book" (Palmer, 1994: 1). Overall, the collection represents an apologetic approach to the COG, one that seems more to advocate religious freedom at any cost.

Psychologist Lawrence Lilliston (1997) conducted a psychological examination (in three homes) of fifty-two children who were born into the COG. His tests results revealed no evidence of systematic child abuse (either physical or emotional), and led Lilliston to conclude that the studies conducted by COG's critics are largely false or misguided (Lilliston, 1997: 62-63). Lilliston, however, did report that adults did have sex with children (Lilliston, 1997: 61). Furthermore, Lilliston assessed the accounts of ex-members as not representational of most people's experiences (this despite the testimonies of ex-members in academic literature, biographies, documentaries, interviews, ex-member support groups, and other forums that afford ex-members [including those born into the group] the opportunity to discuss their experiences, *good* and *bad*).

While Lilliston (1997) concluded that the children are well-adjusted, he did acknowledge that the COG are known for allowing access to "selected homes" (also known as "Media Homes"), and that the possibility exists that: "The [COG] has engaged in deception with this investigator, . . ." (Lilliston, 1997: 77). He also conceded that he based his conclusions without medical examinations of the children. Lilliston's account is clearly apologetic, although I feel it is also important to consider the time-period of his investigation. Berg died in 1994, and Lilliston conducted his

study in a period of the COG's history in which much reorganization has occurred, and the group has abandoned many of the older doctrines.

James T. Richardson (1999) also tackled child abuse allegations and examined some of the police raids that took place in several different countries, but that failed to produce evidence of child abuse.[32] Thus, Richardson concluded that although, the group at one time advocated adult-child sexual relationships, changes within the group resulted in an abandonment of such behaviours. Richardson also discussed the problem of defining what child abuse is, and, the lack of legal wherewithal to determine what constitutes abuse in communal-religious setting (Richardson, 1999: 181-182). Finally, he viewed the raids that took place as part of a larger conspiracy to bring down new religious movements generally, rather than understanding them as a legal concern for child welfare.

Theologian James D. Chancellor's (2000), *Life in the Family: An Oral History of the Children of God,* traced the development of the group from its inception to its current status. Chancellor conducted interviews with over seven hundred members of the group, and many of these are extremely revealing in terms of members' experiences of child sexual abuse and of the expectations that Berg placed upon women and children. Chancellor acknowledged that the Family as it exists today is still a "secretive community" and that, "It may well be that there are yet secrets of Family life hidden from this study" (Chancellor, 2000: xxii-xxiii).

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[32] One ex-member from a Home in Argentina has since described how she told authorities that she had not been sexually abused (when she had been). She added that because no outward physical signs of abuse were evident, the doctor who interviewed her accepted her story. This ex-member said she denied the abuse to protect her family (Ward, 1995: 91-92).

I found Chancellor's position, however, perplexing at times. Although he spent a good deal of time describing the sexual nature of the group's doctrines and many of the associated problems, he often was ambivalent in his analysis of these issues. He seemed to relieve Berg from any responsibility as he stated: "Father David did not issue any clear instructions that mandated sexual contact between adults and children" (Chancellor, 2000: 11). But then in the same paragraph he stated:

> Most disciples were aware that sexual contact between adults and children was occurring in the King's [Berg's] household. Some disciples interpreted certain *Mo Letters* as encouraging sexual contact between children and for allowing sexual interplay[33] of adults with minors. It is not possible to determine the extent or degree of this activity, *but it was not merely a localized phenomenon* (Chancellor, 2000: 11-12 [emphasis added]).

Despite Chancellor's occasional ambivalence, his account is comprehensive and he attended to the problems of child abuse, flirty-fishing, punishment regimes, and other abuse and control issues within the group.

The most recent account of the group is William Sims Bainbridge's "*The Endtime Family: Children of God*" (2002). In this book, the author presented the results of his statistical survey in which he compared the results of 1000 completed questionnaires (from the Family) to the responses compiled by the General Social Survey (GSS). Bainbridge's goal was to see if life in the group is different from life in general American society. He concluded that the group is indeed different,

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[33] The term "sexual interplay" seems an odd one. Most people would describe sexual contact between adults and children "abuse." For example, see: Finkelhor (1984); DeChesnay (1986); DeYoung (1982); Itzin (2000); and Mayer (1985).

particularly in terms of worship, religiosity, and alienation from governmental processes. He, however, failed to address anything other than the surface questioning that most surveys present. Moreover, by reducing his information to statistical comparison with mainstream society he neglected to address some of the issues that really make the Children of God different. He did not ask members questions that pertain to their specific history. Thus, by using the GSS he skirted the potentially revealing questions.

Many of the aforementioned accounts describe the group's troubles in terms of Berg's authoritarian leadership, and most discuss (to a greater or lesser extent) the problem of women and children's treatment in the group. None, however, specifically analyse the body as a locus of control. Moreover, with the exception of Kent (1994a), no academic work addresses the specific influence that David Berg exerted on the group in terms of his psychological history and the influence that it had on his followers' sexual mores.

In my own biopsychosocial profile of Berg, I supplement Kent's (1994) examination of Berg's psychosexual history with a social and historical overview of Berg's family background and an analysis of Berg's sexual abuses of children (both incest and pedophilia). I argue that analyses of incest, pedophilia, and the role that alcohol plays in these problems helps to elucidate why the bodies of women and children emerged as loci of control in Berg's written doctrines and in the practices that he promoted in the group. Moreover, I look specifically to some literature that helps to explain Berg's attraction to both children and adults. Indeed, the vast

majority of Berg's sexually orientated material addressed the nature of women's bodies and how he located them in a religious context.

Attributional processes about the sexual nature of bodies took place not only at the leadership level but also among the members of the group. As with my examination of Heaven's Gate, aspects of attribution theory allow me to trace the connection from the leader's psyche to the group's belief system and associated practices. Moreover, social scientific research of the body again provide clues to how the translation of these ideas functioned as social control mechanisms within the group setting.

First, however, I present a general overview of Berg's personal social background. Like Applewhite, Berg's upbringing, in part, sets the groundwork for some of the sexual-body issues that he later dwelled upon and turned into religiously defined beliefs and behaviours.

David Berg: A Biopsychosocial Profile

I Social and Family History

David Berg, also known to his followers as Moses David, Father David, and Grandpa, was born February 18, 1919 to a family with a strong ministerial tradition. His father, Hjalmer Berg, was a minister, but his mother, Virginia, exerted the most influence on Berg's life. Her own father had been a minister, and, as a young girl, Virginia had been involved in religious activities. Virginia travelled with her husband as he toured around the country, evangelising to the communities that he visited. Following an accident that left her paralysed[34] for a period of time, Virginia

[34]Deborah Davis's grandmother had claimed to be fully paralysed for five years before a 'miraculous' recovery restored her body. She had used this story to bolster her subsequent preaching. It appears,

made a recovery that inspired her own evangelism and preaching. In the years that followed, her charismatic style and her accomplished orations overshadowed those of her husband. Eventually Hjalmer stepped down, allowing Virginia to lead the family's ministerial duties (Davis with Davis, 1984: 16-22; 28).

Virginia Berg spoiled her son. As a child, Berg developed a resentment toward others who did not see things his way. His mother encouraged his selfishness, never teaching him how to accept responsibility for his actions. Thus, Berg did not learn how to apologise for his mistakes. He could admit no wrong-doing, and as a result, developed a "persecution complex" that remained with him throughout his adult life (Davis with Davis, 1984: 25).

In 1941, Berg was drafted into the army, but because of a heart condition that he suffered, the military discharged him. Berg married his wife, Jane, in 1944. Their first child, Linda (who later became known as Deborah)[35] was born in 1946; their second child, Paul (who became Aaron), was born in 1948 (Davis with Davis, 1984: 22-23; Van Zandt, 1991: 31). Meanwhile, Berg and his mother remained close, preaching together as they travelled the country, until Berg built and established his own church in Arizona, a chapter of the Christian Missionary Alliance (the church that his parents had established). Berg set up the church in 1949, and remained until 1951 when the parishioners expelled him. Some confusion surrounds this event.

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however, that although she suffered severe pain and injury she was *not* paralysed for five years. During the time that she claimed paralysis, she bore a child. Also, according to relatives, Virginia was not hit by an automobile (as she had claimed), but tripped and fell on the ice, an accident from which she made a gradual rather than miraculous recovery (Davis with Davis, 1984:30-31).

[35] Like the members of Heaven's Gate, members of COG had to change their names. In this case, each adopted a Biblical name. David Berg had his closest followers—his biological family and his wife and mistresses—legally change their names (Davis with Davis, 1984: 6-7). As I discussed in the previous chapter, name changing contributes to group loyalty (S. Balch, 1985: 322), and plays a role in the reconfiguration of self and body.

Berg asserted that the congregation were racists who got rid of him because he preached to the local native Indian population (Davis with Davis, 1984: 23; Van Zandt, 1991: 32). The alternative version of his removal states that the parishioners dismissed Berg for sexual misconduct. Regardless of the reasons, Berg's daughter, Deborah, argued that at this point her father adopted an anti-establishment position coupled with "a deep-seated bitterness and hatred toward the established church" (Davis with Davis, 1984: 23).

David and Jane had two more children—Jonathan (who became Hosea) in 1950, and Faithy (who became Faith) in 1951. Berg taught at a Christian school, but felt discontented with his life. After he left his teaching position in 1954, he met Fred Jordan. According to Deborah, Jordon was the second most influential person in her father's life after his mother, Virginia (Davis with Davis, 1984: 26).

Jordon ran the Texas Soul Clinic, an organization that trained missionaries. Jordon's approach to religion appealed to Berg. He operated without the trappings of traditional religion—he promoted religion without church, and without ceremony. For nearly fifteen years, David Berg and his family worked for Jordon. They ran branches of his missionary school in Miami and Texas. During their time in Florida, Berg's anti-establishment position manifested in his offensives on local church groups. He sent his children in to disturb Sunday service proceedings. The police responded, and the Berg's left for Texas, only to return to Miami and then to once again to leave in disgrace. Finally, after spending a year on the road travelling through many American states, and visiting Canada and Mexico, David Berg took his family to Huntington Beach, California (Davis with Davis, 1984: 26-27; Van Zandt:

31-33). Here, his mother had established a local ministry where she helped down-and-out hippies in need of food and care (Davis with Davis, 1984: 27).

Virginia Brandt had hoped that one of her three children would be as successful a minister as her own father had been, and she had harboured particularly high hopes for David. Her influence on Berg was far-reaching. Moreover, her deceit about the extent of her paralysis years earlier troubles Davis. Knowing that her "miraculous" recovery was the cornerstone of her grandmother's evangelism, Davis pondered the extent to which her grandmother lied, and used Christianity as a vehicle for these lies so that she might increase her evangelical ambitions. Davis posited that her father may have modelled himself on his mother, using religious means to attain selfish ends (Davis with Davis, 1984: 31-33). She argued that his goals were sexually motivated and, "The magnificence and glory of Christianity and the gospels of Jesus Christ had degenerated to nothing more than a tool to advance his selfish purposes and perfidious desires" (Davis with Davis, 1984: 34). Moreover, he "reject[ed] scriptural morality and redefine[d] it" (Davis with Davis, 1984: 34). Whatever the truth about Virginia and the moral nature of her life, Berg's relationship with her and his time at Huntington Beach were foundational to his development of the Children of God. The group emerged in California, but in order to understand the origins of some of its beliefs and practices one must look to the sexual history of its leader.

II Sexual History

David Berg's sexual history warrants separate attention because sexuality played a prominent role in many aspects of the Children of God's doctrines, and is important to my discussion of control of the body. Kent (1994) argued that Berg's "antinomian

sexuality" emerged from a combination of early childhood sexual experiences, his mother's attitudes and reactions to sexuality, and the sexually permissive 1096s counterculture that provided the backdrop to Berg's establishment of the group (Kent, 1994: 140-141).

By his own account, Berg had his first sexual experience when he was just three years old. In the *Mo Letter*, "Real Mothers,"[36] he described how his babysitter manually and orally stimulated his penis in order to help him fall sleep. Importantly, he expressed the pleasure of the experiences, "I LIKED IT WHEN SHE PETTED AND SUCKED MY PENIS TO PUT ME TO SLEEP—AT THREE YEARS OF AGE! Well, why shouldn't I?—I still like it!" (Berg, 1975: 6). Berg's mother got rid of the babysitter after discovering what had happened. Furthermore, in another *Mo Letter*, "Revolutionary Sex," Berg described having sex with his cousin when he was seven years of age. This time his uncle caught them, and physically punished the children. This punishment did not deter them, and they continued to engage in sexual behaviours. Berg also explained how an older boy taught him how to masturbate, and how at age twelve he experienced his first production of seminal fluid. He subsequently made sure that his mother did not discover his night time emissions stating, "I would promptly change the sheet to hide the awful truth from my dear mother" (Berg, 1973a: 1340-1342). Nevertheless, at various times she apparently caught him masturbating.

[36] It is interesting to note that the title, "Real Mothers," seems to endorse and normalise sexual contact between mothers and their children. Berg located his discussion of his childhood sexual experiences within a cultural framework (that is, he argued that the prohibition in North America of adult-child sexual contact and child-child sexual contact is culturally bound). I argue that, given the nature of the power relationship that developed within the group, the type of sexual experiences that he promoted were not always (and in some cases, never) consensual. Thus, I argue that his cultural justification is not adequate. Moreover, Berg endorsed these practices in countries where sexual contact between adults and minors was neither culturally sanctioned nor legal.

Kent (1994) discussed the guilt and shame that Berg experienced due to his mother's punishment of her son's behaviour, and the horror of being caught by his uncle. He noted, "As the adult leader of COG, Berg established policies that were completely opposite the sexual prohibitions that he endured as a child" (Kent, 1994: 149). As Kent argued, when his mother died in 1968, Berg finally was freed from her condemnation and control which he had always associated with her conservative Christianity (Kent, 1994: 153). Berg expressed his relief at being free, " . . . I myself, personally suffered for years the tortures of the demons of hell with their Goddamned churchy attitudes towards sex with which they had filled me!" (Berg, 1973a: 1358). Berg's ability to finally do as he pleased without parental censure no doubt contributed to the group's shift from ". . . early strict asceticism . . . to complete sexual freedom" (Van Zandt, 1991: 5).

In the years following his mother's death, Berg began writing the *Mo Letters* that shaped the conduct of the members of the Children of God. In the letters that dealt with sexuality, a progression occurs from the "ascetic" days that Van Zandt (1991) observed, to a full-blown disregard of almost all sexual norms.[37] In this way, Berg enmeshed his own desires for sexual freedom into group doctrine. The sexual freedoms that he chose for himself, also are ones that he imposed on others, using theological rhetoric to justify and enforce some of the practices that he promoted.

The abandonment of those sexual norms that protect children and women are of particular interest to me. I argue that Berg's disregard of laws (specifically those that exist for the protection of children from incest and pedophilia, and the laws against

[37] Berg instituted only one sexual proscription; like many fundamentalist Christians, he disapproved of male homosexuality.

prostitution and rape), resulted in the location of women and children's bodies in the power relationship that McGuire (1990) discussed. Moreover, Berg's concepts of sexual sharing and the guilt that he made women experience if they did not comply with his doctrines, all contributed to the control of women's bodies in the group. As the literature on incest and pedophilia reveals, the sexual molestation of children locates them in a position of powerlessness, in which the perpetrators control their bodies whilst creating a rationalization system for the abuse that they commit.

III Incest and Pedophilia

i incest

Most research on incest comes from self-reports of victims of the abuse, so it tells us little about the motivations of the offender (DeYoung, 1982: 2-3). Moreover, because incest victims often do not report their abuse to the authorities, it is difficult to establish what the "usual" characteristics of the abuser are (DeChesnay, 1985: 391-392; DeYoung, 1982: 2-3). Some patterns do emerge, however, within the incestuous family context. For instance, "One of the outstanding characteristics of an incestuous family is that it is *patriarchal* in nature" (Herman and Hirschmann, cited in DeYoung, 1982: 9 [emphasis added]). Additionally, some researchers argue that incestuous fathers tend to either come from broken homes or have an ambiguous relationship with their mothers and fathers (especially their fathers). Regardless of the incestuous father's background and situation with his own wife:

> One thing which must occur before the incest is initiated is that the father or stepfather must convince himself that becoming sexually involved with his daughter is *acceptable and even normal.* He

> accomplishes this through a complex rationalization system (DeYoung, 1982: 12 [emphasis added]).

While it appears from Berg's background that he may not have endured specific problems with his father, his relationship with his mother was certainly fraught with tension. These factors, however, are not necessarily essential to the development of pedophiles. Moreover, as I discuss later, not all research points to family concerns as the origins of sexual abuse.

The literature does concur, however, that incestuous fathers develop different rationalization systems. The father may regard his sexual relationship with his daughter as a form of education (for her); as the result of the daughter's seductive nature; or as something that is pleasurable for the child. Other fathers rationalize their behaviour by blaming their alcoholism, saying that alcohol prevented them from controlling themselves. Still others claim that it is their daughter's duty to have sex with them, or that because she is *his possession*, he may do with her what he pleases. Finally, some incestuous fathers argue that they are sexually liberating their daughters (and other people with whom they are having sex) from "archaic and repressive sexual attitudes" (DeYoung, 1982: 12-15).[38]

Research also shows that incest usually "evolves," that is, the father typically spends much time getting physically closer to his daughter in ways that are not overtly sexual to begin with. Over a period of time, the father initiates closer sexual contact. Incest rarely begins with aggressive penetrative rape (DeYoung, 1982: 32-35). The most common form of incest is father-daughter incest, and the age of the

[38] Pedophiles make similar rationalizations (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 527).

daughter at the onset of the abuse is usually about five to seven years of age (Mayer, 1985: 27-28).

Berg's first daughter, Deborah Davis recalled the first time that her father sexually molested her when she was eight years old. She described being too upset and scared to tell anyone about what had happened. Davis stated that Berg did not attempt abuse her again until she was twelve, and at this age she managed to avoid his advances. Moreover, she described his as a "good father" except for his incestuous advances (Ohno, 1992: 3-4). According to Davis, Berg himself announced (at a "Royal Family" meeting) that he had been sexually involved with his other daughter Faithy for some years (Ohno, 1992: 6). Furthermore, Berg's granddaughter, Merry described her first sexual encounter with her grandfather at age seven (Ohno, 1992: 13-14).[39]

Berg's alleged incestuous activity with Deborah, Faithy, and Merry likely stemmed from several of the aforementioned rationalizations. First, Berg rationalized that the relationship would be pleasurable for his daughter (after all he recalled his own pleasure at childhood sex). Second, if he were drinking heavily at that time, then he may have used it as justification for his actions. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I argue that Berg used a "sexual liberation" rationalization not only for his incestuous behaviour but also for his encouragement later for other group members to engage in sexual contact with their own children.

Given the content of many of Berg's *Mo Letters* in which he advocated sexual freedom for all, the sexual liberation rationalization might have been the strongest for him. Although much of the literature on incest describes fathers' feeling shame,

[39] Merry's father Aaron (Berg's son) reportedly committed suicide.

guilt, and confusion at their actions, Berg appears not to have exhibited any of these emotions. This apparent lack of shame, guilt, and confusion may well be because the sexual liberation rationalization freed him from them. If he rationalized his actions in terms of helping his daughter and other people overcome oppressive social and religious sexual mores, then he may not have experienced conflict.

According to Davis, Berg openly declared his ongoing incestuous relationship with Faithy, and in a letter entitled "The Devil Hates Sex" (Berg, 1980) promoted this practice (Davis, 1980: 204; 244). In a dialogue between Berg and his mistress, Maria, they discuss societal taboos against incest. Maria stated, "Well, we'll just have to tell the kids that it's not prohibited by God, . . ." (Berg, 1980: 7696). After a brief discussion, Berg added, "I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL AGE HAS GOT TO DO WITH IT" (Berg, 1980: 7697).

Berg's sexual control of his own children's bodies translated into the social setting in his promotion of both incest and pedophilia. Berg attributed his relationships with children to a divine right bestowed upon him by God. Those of his followers who did act upon his sexual directives regarding children attributed Berg's words as ones that he received from and were sanctioned by God. Thus for those adult men (and women), doing Berg's (and therefore God's) work became a form of rationalization in their social context.

ii pedophilia

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) identifies two types of pedophilia. Exclusive Type Pedophilia describes those people who are

sexually attracted only to children. Non Exclusive Pedophilia refers to those people who not only are sexually attracted to children but also to adults.

Studies suggest that a large percentage of pedophiles come from troubled backgrounds and many have suffered either physical or sexual abuse as children (DeYoung, 1982: 115). But, as Ivey and Simpson (1998) commented, no all-encompassing psychological model exists to explain definitively the background and personality of pedophiles. Moreover, from my own literature review, I have found that the majority of studies focus on Exclusive Type Pedophiles.

In the edited volume, *Pedophilia, Biosocial Dimensions* (Feierman 1990), academic and convicted pedophile Doanld C. Silva (a pseudonym), described his own experiences as a pedophile. Of particular interest to me, is that Silva, like Berg, was attracted to both adults and children and thus falls into the category of Non Exclusive Pedophile. Silva begins his account, "I believe I was born a pedophile, because I have had feelings of sexual attraction toward children and love for them for as long as I can remember. I was not traumatized into this age orientation . . ." (Silva, 1990: 464). Therefore, although a large body of research exists that looks at different possible contributing factors to pedophilia, Silva's account places the phenomena as something that *is*, rather than something than *develops* or has a *cause* (or causes). Of course, as a subjective account, Silva's discussion may be flawed—perhaps he cannot see the contributing factors—if indeed there are any.

Taking a different perspective, sociologist David Finklehor (1984) posited that too much research into child sexual abusers has framed the abuse in terms of the alleged psychopathology of the individual. He argues in favour of a model that looks

to the social conditions that facilitate child sexual abuse. He claimed, "It is clear that cultural forces can modify the propensity of large numbers of adults to be sexually interested in children" (Finklehor, 1984: 35). Here he refers to a study that examined the sexual norm of the Lepcha in India who advocate adult male relationships with female children. While research may never solve the *innate* versus *learned behaviour* models of pedophilia, Finklehor's insight may help explain the phenomenon of why some other group members engaged in sexual relationships with children (and here, I am talking about those adults in the group who would not otherwise have engaged in sexual relationships with children if Berg had not sanctioned them). Berg advocated adult-child relationships, thus making it an acceptable norm within their closed group sub-culture.

There are many and varied approaches to, and theories of incest, pedophilia, and other sexual abuses. Fortunately, some research brings all forms of sexual abuse (against women and children) together. These studies help to develop a more all-inclusive approach to sex crimes generally.

iii incest and pedophilia: a continuum of abuse

Recent studies place incest and pedophilia (along with other sexual abuses), on a single continuum of abuse. Catherine Itzin (2001) found that the traditional categorizations of "incest offender" or "pedophile" were inadequate. She argued, "there is a growing body of research and clinical work with sex offenders which shows a very substantial overlap between paedophilia and incest, and also with rape" (Itzin, 2001: 36). Her own research and her review of the work of others revealed that in recent years social scientists are starting to reconceptualize sex offenders and

their offences. Itzin uncovered studies that show how some offenders abuse their own children, the children of close relatives, and non-familial children. Some of these abusers also are involved in the production or distribution of pornography (Itzin, 2001: 36-37). Moreover, one study reported findings that heterosexual pedophiles do not typically conform to some of the traditional ideas about their personality type. Thus, rather than being introverted and fearful of adult females (as much research previously suggested), this study found, "'that 66% of 'heterosexual pedophiles' were married at some time [and] 91% had vaginal intercourse with an adult female . . .'" (Langevin and Lang cited in Itzin, 2001: 37).

The approach that this research takes allows for the understanding that we should not categorize the sexual offender just as one type of abuser or another. The approach posits that the men (most sexual offenders are heterosexual males), do not necessarily conform to the pedophile stereotype. Most offenders are "respectable" men that abuse their own children and others. These findings expand on the category of Non-Exclusive Pedophile (although Itzin herself argued against the word "pedophile" because of the restrictive nature of the term [Itzin, 2001: 38]).

iv Reconciling the Research

I use the *DSM*'s categorization of Non Exclusive Pedophile to describe Berg's psychopathology. Alongside this diagnosis, however, I argue that Itzin's (2001) approach is paramount to my understanding of the many and varied sexual abuses that Berg engaged in. Moreover, although the preceding sections deal with Berg's abuse of children, Itzin's work provides a vital connection between his sexual attraction to children and his sexual attraction to adult women. She observed a social

network in which the abuser lives and operates, and thus decentralizes the pathological aspect of the abuser. As Itzin's study illustrates, sexual abusers often also have long-term relationships with adult women. (For example, Berg was particularly close to Maria.) Itzin's emphasis on social connections and social context does not mean that an abuser such as Berg does not suffer from some form of psychopathology, but it does broaden the context of study in which the abuser exists.

The majority of literature that I have examined discusses types of rationalization. The rationalization process appears not only to help the perpetrator overcome any psychological discomfort, but, I argue, allows for the possibility that the practice becomes morally and socially acceptable. In this way, an abuser such as Berg may institute incest and pedophilia as social practices, removing it from the realms of psychopathology. As acceptable social norms, incest and pedophilia lose their taboo statuses, and legitimate the sexual role of children in the group. Moreover, in this way, Berg and his members need not see their sexual relationships with children as abusive, but instead, as natural and as God-sanctioned practices. This normalization process, I argue, is the very way in which children's bodies emerged as a locus of control. Moreover, the power relationship that McGuire (1990) discusses becomes all the more evident when one sees the testimony of ex-members who spent their childhoods within the group. My discussion of the Padillo family (later in the chapter), provides evidence of this type of relationship.

IV The Role of Alcohol

"My confession!—I was an Alcoholic!" (Berg, 1982a: 1).

In Berg's confession he does not say at what age he started to have a problem with alcohol, but I propose that his problem was reasonably long-term because as Berg admits, "I ABUSED MY BODY, I NEARLY KILLED MYSELF! I apparently permanently damaged my stomach, my throat & my oesophagus, and I can thank the Lord I'm still alive . . . . At one time I couldn't & wouldn't eat anything" (Berg, 1982a: 14). Berg even gave an indication of how much he drank (although his reflection may not be accurate). He claimed that in the twenty-one day period before he finally quit, he consumed sixty-nine bottles of sherry (Berg, 1982a: 27).

Scholars have discussed the role of alcohol in the context of child abuse because of both its disinhibitory effects and its connection to the rationalization process. Adele Mayer reports that alcohol abuse is linked to most child sexual abuse cases, although she stresses that it does not *cause* the abuse. She concludes that the disinhibiting effect of alcohol is significant (Mayer, 1985: 12). The relationship between alcohol and child sexual abuse, however, may be difficult to assess. In one study of father-daughter incest, research revealed several reasons for alcohol use. Some fathers drink alcohol before they molest in order to overcome their inhibitions and control; others may drink after the molestation during the rationalization process; and others may just say that they drink so as to use alcohol as an excuse for their behaviour, even if the don't drink in association with molestation at all (DeChesnay, 1985: 394). Certainly, Berg discussed the disinhibitory nature of alcohol. In 1969, prior to his open advocacy of sexual "sharing," Berg advised, "Wine: stimulates sex,

relaxes tensions and inhibitions, . . ." (Berg, 1969: 81). Berg did not engage in any discussion of alcohol in connection with children, so it is difficult to say with any certainty whether alcohol was a contributing factor in his abuse of them.

The Children of God: The Location of the Body and the Role of Attribution

I Committing to Berg's End-time Prophecy

When Berg arrived in Huntington Beach, California during the late 1960s, his mother had been feeding down-and-out hippies who lived by the local pier. Berg regarded them as his next ministerial project.. He became involved with Teen Challenge, a youth organization that helped adolescents to improve their lives and to find God. Berg immediately made a connection with the kids by appealing to their rebellious sides. He rejected traditional ways of preaching, and included music in his ministering. Berg encouraged his followers to embrace Christ, give up all their ties to the outside world, and devote themselves full-time to his end-time prophecy (Van Zandt, 1991: 33). Berg named his group of devotees "Teens for Christ" (Davis with Davis, 1984: 35-36).

Following the death of Berg's mother in 1968, he intensified his rejection of traditional religion and of authority, and increased his apocalyptic preaching to countercultural youth (Davis with Davis, 1984: 37). Berg infused his followers with feelings of superiority. They believed that they were part of a religious rebellion in which Teens for Christ represented a new way forward for Christianity. Not only did the group reject church authority, but also its members rejected the government, their parents, and society generally (Davis with Davis, 1984: 43-45). They called the people of society "systemites" (Van Zandt, 1991: 51). In this atmosphere of rebellion

and revolution, Berg established the "Forsake All" doctrine. This policy required members to sever connections with their families and to the outside world. In fact, they had to relinquish all aspects of their lives to commit fully to Berg (Van Zandt, 1991: 33).

The group attracted many new followers, only some of whom could commit to the Forsake All doctrine. Berg took some fifty followers 'on the road' to attract new recruits, and, by 1970, numbers had increased to around 200.[40] The media started to take notice of the group whose members were prominent among the larger "Jesus Movement" of the time. In the same year, it adopted the name, the Children of God, and Berg proclaimed himself as their prophet, Moses David (Davis with Davis, 1984: 74-75). With the rapid expansion that followed, most new recruits never actually met Berg, but instead joined in various cities across the United States. Berg then subdivided the group so that they could proselytize across the nation. In 1970, Berg left to spread his revolutionary prophecy in Europe, eventually making his home in England.[41]

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[40] At its height in 1977, the group had over 5,000 followers worldwide; approximately 1,500 of whom were children (Van Zandt, 1991: 49).

[41] Berg and his closest followers known as the "Royal Family" lived in England for many years. His daughter, Deborah, was one of his principle organizers within the group. She traveled around the world in an organizational and supervisory capacity to various colonies that the group set up. From 1971 to 1973, the group attracted several thousand followers in many different countries. It is well beyond the scope of my thesis to discuss the development of the group in its many locations around the world. The COG witnessing techniques were particularly successful because they spread a message of love for Jesus and God that appealed to the youth of the 1970s. Many of these youth had been politically active but were disenchanted with the lack of progress made in political and social arena (Kent, 2001), and looked to new religious movements as way to achieve their goals for peace and love. As Kent (2001) stresses, many of the people who joined the newly emerging religions of this period did so out of a desire to change the world through religious rather than political means and "this change indicated their *adoption of new means to achieve the same goal*" (Kent, 2001: 41[emphasis in the original]). COG appealed to just such people. For example, former member Miriam Williams described her attraction to the group in these terms. See Williams, (1998). The group also attracted younger Christians looking for a "modern" religion. The Padillo family (whom I discuss later) joined the group for this reason. For a full account of the group's development and expansion see: Chancellor

During these early years of the group, Berg forbade sexual relationships between members unless a local group leader gave the couple permission to marry.[42] In each commune, leaders segregated men and women's sleeping quarters and monitored much of the male/female interactions. Even during social events, contact between men and women was limited. As former member Miriam Williams comments, "There was no slow dancing and no touching body-body. It was very innocent and extremely exhilarating" (Williams, 1998: 41). Thus, control of members' bodies during this stage of the group's development involved a regimented approach. Men and women had little interaction, and the leaders kept each member of the group extremely busy with commune chores, witnessing, litnessing,[43] and worship.

Although most new recruits never met Berg himself, they knew of his status as an "end-time prophet" who offered salvation to those who followed him. Despite the often harsh living conditions and constant fatigue, Williams recalls:

> Mo was a charismatic leader, but most of his followers, including me, never saw him in person. Whenever doubts entered my mind about following a 'personality,' I reminded myself that it was the *ideal* I was following, not the person who expressed it. . . . . I thought the ideals he preached could change the world (Williams, 1998: 38 [emphasis in the original]).

(2000); Davis with Davis (1984); and Van Zandt (1991). For a discussion of the appeal of new religious movements in this era generally, see Kent (2001).

[42] The marriages were COG weddings rather than legal weddings. Couples usually only obtained legal marriages if the woman became pregnant. Moreover, leaders sometimes arranged marriages (Williams, 1998: 56-57).

[43] Litnessing was the term the group used for witnessing while simultaneously selling COG literature.

Williams explains that she endured the way of life for "idealistic reasons" (Williams, 1998: 38). Like so many other members she was willing to construct a new self-identity, one that reflected her commitment to higher ideals.

Berg had endured feelings of personal failure until he established his ministry in California. He set himself up as the prophet who could save America's youth from the "whoredom" of their country. He established himself as a modern-day saviour who possessed the knowledge of the end time and how to achieve salvation. He likely attributed his self-proclaimed Godliness at least in part to the religious legacy of his family, but (as his daughter Deborah asserted), more than that, he desired the power to realize his own personal goals (Davis with Davis, 1984: 33-34). His followers believed that he was indeed God's prophet and attributed his purported revelations to Godly connections. Believing that all Berg's commands were the wishes of God, members of COG obediently complied. Moreover, because so many of the members wanted to contribute to a better world, they were willing to follow his commands no matter what they entailed.

Just as context was crucial to the attributional patterns that emerged in Heaven's Gate, context was very important also for the members of the COG. Immersed in communal settings where leaders espoused idealistic goals of sharing all, spreading God's word, and changing the world, the members of the COG believed that anything was possible if they worked hard, kept their focus, and believed in God. Moreover, each new recruit felt a connection to the others—they were all part of the same struggle (Davis with Davis, 1984: 41). In addition, as Kent (1994b) established, members were willing to endure personal physical and emotional hardship because

many had had "born-again" experiences that reinforced their attribution that Berg was God's prophet (Kent, 1994b: 33). Moreover, members feared that to doubt or refuse Berg's policies was selfish, and could cost one his or her salvation (Williams, 1998; Smithson, 1994; Davis with Davis, 1984). Critically, each time that Berg requested that his followers were to engage in a particular practice, he explained his commands in terms of rebellion against the system, and love for God. As Davis explained:

> To doubt any of Mo's revelations would be to doubt the miraculous circumstances that had brought each disciple to learn at the feet of God's prophet. Each one of us believed we had been led there by the very hand of God (Davis with Davis, 1984: 66-67).

The institution not only of Berg as prophet, but also of unquestioning commitment from the group followers, were important to the establishment of the doctrines that are central to my examination of the relationship between Berg's sexuality, the sexualization of women's and children's bodies in the group, and thus their emergence as loci of control. Building upon an established pattern of attribution and motivations (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975), Berg was able to introduce more radical ideas that pushed the limits of his followers' obedience. Their willingness to please God (and so to please Berg) resulted in many women sacrificing their own bodies, and in other followers engaging in sexual relationships with children. In this way, the COG leadership situated the bodies of some of its members in positions of subjugation.

II From Asceticism to Antinomianism—A Weberian Overview

The early emphasis on chastity within each of the communal settings, coupled with the long work hours and time spent in worship is reminiscent of the ascetic mores that Weber (1920) discussed. The bodies of the new recruits in the COG represented their dedication to God. They abstained from fleshly pleasures and adopted a work ethic that few of the members had prior to joining the group. Typically their work did not result in the accumulation of wealth however, as most of the communes lived hand-to-mouth. Any wealthy recruits to the group handed over their money in accordance with the Forsake All policy, and (as Williams commented), those large sums of money likely went directly to Berg, as there was little evidence of it within each group setting.

Berg never espoused ascetic tendencies as the central path to salvation in the way that the Catholic monks and nuns, and the Protestant sects had done. Thus, it seems that Berg never did fully embrace either the other-worldy or inner-worldy asceticism that Weber described. He did eventually place, however, overt and unrestricted sexuality at the core of the road to salvation. This shift in sexual norms resulted in an antinomian rather than ascetic way of life.

The shift from asceticism to antinomianism marked (I argue) the expression of Berg's true desires. Although Berg initially advocated strict rules of conduct regarding sexuality, he had continually applied different standards to his own life. After marrying his wife Jane, and before he established the COG, he had had extra-marital affairs. He always justified his behaviour with Biblical explanations, comparing himself to prophets who had more than one wife. In this way, he

proclaimed that his role as a prophet meant that he too had a God-given right to engage in sexual relationships with other women (Davis with Davis, 1984: 29).

As I discussed previously, Berg allegedly sexually molested his daughters Deborah and Faithy, and his granddaughter Merry. Berg's sexual habits had always been antinomian, and it was only a matter of time before he introduced his personal preferences into group doctrine. From this progression it is evident that he first established control over the women of the group before eventually introducing his ideas about childhood sexuality.

Weber identified the antinomian approach to salvation as one that embraces unbridled actions. Berg epitomized this attitude, considering himself "no longer bound by any rule of conduct." No matter what behaviours he engaged in himself and advocated for others, "he [was] certain of salvation" (Weber, 1922: 1974). The translation of Berg's personal antinomian desires into the social setting occurred through specific *Mo Letters* that he started to circulate in the mid-1970s. These letters are important to my discussions both of women's and of children's bodies as loci of control within the group. Moreover, the attributions that women made regarding the content of the letters contributed to their new perceptions about their own bodies. In this way, they accepted new beliefs, and new behaviours that they would not have entertained previously.

III Women's Bodies

Berg wrote countless *Mo Letters* that placed women's bodies as a locus of control, and it is impossible for me to include an analysis of all of them. He published many letters other than the ones that I discuss here that looked at sexuality

within the group. He even wrote some "how to" guides for couples, advising them on all manner of sexual matters (e.g. "Revolutionary Lovemaking" 1970).

In most (if not all) of his sexually inspired writings, Berg equated sexuality with Godliness in some way or another. He told his followers not to feel shameful about sexuality and about the sexual nature of their bodies. Berg encouraged them to redefine sexuality in terms of God's wishes rather than in terms of Satan's temptations. While many of these ideals are positive in and of themselves, the reality for members of the group was often not at all attractive. Over the years, the letters became increasingly patriarchal and sexist in nature, such that Berg placed the needs of the group and the needs of men above the needs of the women. Indeed, even in the early letters one cannot help but get a sense that Berg never quite placed women on an equal footing with men. Furthermore, Berg's abandonment of legal prohibitions proved disastrous for many women and children in the group. His antinomianism evolved over the years, and as Williams comments, "Mo's control over our minds and bodies developed through a gradual process" (Williams, 1998: 38).

With the *Mo Letter*, "One Wife" (Berg, 1972) Berg introduced the concept of plural wives to the group. He declared that because Biblical justifications existed for polygamy, the group should also embrace this doctrine. He insisted that exclusive marriage units of two were "selfish" and against God's will. Critically, he identified that the wife of any one man henceforth was the wife of all other men (Berg, 1972: 1367-1369). In one particular passage, Berg described how the group was essentially one large family, and that the dissolution of individual families was God's wish. He said of God:

> He's in the business of destroying the relationships of **many** wives in order to make them **One** wife—**God's** wife—**The** Bride of **Christ**! God is not averse to breaking up selfish little families for **His** Glory, to make the pieces of a much larger unselfish unit—the **Whole** Family—the **entire** Bride—the **One Wife** instead of **many** wives! (Berg, 1972: 1368).

Important to my discussion of women in the group is Berg's assertion here, that each woman as an 'entire bride" and as "one wife" is accessible to all men in the group. Thus, when she marries, she becomes not only the bride and wife of one man, but of all men. Moreover, in another letter, Berg warned women against the perils of jealousy, attributing possessiveness of another to Satan (Berg, 1973b: 1373-1374). Thus, Berg introduced the concept of sexual "sharing," a policy that he referred to frequently in his writings.

In the early 1970s, Berg distributed several more letters that focused on the role of women in the group. In "Revolutionary Women" (Berg 1973c), he started to promote a different image for women, one that broke with the previous concern that all women should dress conservatively. He declared, **"ON THE WHOLE, A WOMAN SHOULD WEAR AS LITTLE CLOTHING AS POSSIBLE"** (Berg, 1973c: 1317). Although Berg stated that clothing should be comfortable for the women, it appears that the satisfaction of the men of the group was always the bottom line:

> if you want to be attractive to us men, **show as much as possible without showing too much**. You should just show enough to keep

> the man or men in your life around you satisfied and happy with your appearance, and just **hide enough to hold their continued interest** (Berg, 1973c: 1320).

Berg instituted a braless rule with the publication of "Come on Ma!—Burn Your Bra!" (Berg, 1973d), but as Kent (1994) noted, the command was a parody of the countercultural trend. In this case the braless rule was not for the benefit of women, but for the benefit of Berg (Kent, 1994: 162-164). Moreover, he advised that women should learn how to strip-tease (Berg, 1973c: 1317). Berg did not liberate women's bodies from inequality; instead he subjected them to a different set of rules—his rules.

Berg articulated his preferences in detail. He did not want the women of the group merely to put their bodies on permanent display; rather, he advised against continuous nudity and articulated his disgust within mainstream pornography. Berg wanted women to have pleasing bodies, but on his terms: "**There must be an expression to her body, an expression of excitement, eagerness, and anticipation**" (Berg, 1973c: 1322). Moreover, Berg did not want women just for their bodies, but claimed that they must make men happy in other ways too. Thus, women must attend to men's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs (Berg, 1973c: 1322). In the same letter, he gave matter-of-fact fashion "advice" to women, and told them how they should take care of themselves. He covered everything from personal hygiene to how women should wear their hair (long and straight).

Although the "Forsake All" policy paved the way for Berg's doctrine of Flirty Fishing in the coming years (Davis with Davis, 1984: 42), the contents of "One Wife"

and "Revolutionary Women" also helped to prepare women for their role as prostitutes. Many of the women, however, embraced some of his recommendations. As Williams points out, "these new found freedoms in the area of sex were exciting and desirable" (Williams, 1998: 77). Prior to these letters, women had had to wear frumpy clothing and leaders paired them off with men to whom they were not necessarily attracted. Moreover, Williams identified the widening of sexual relationships as an opportunity to increase emotional intimacies on a friendship level, something that women were starved of because the leaders ensured that they were constantly busy cooking, cleaning, looking after babies and children, witnessing, litnessing, and provisioning.[44] Thus, in the context of an oppressive setting, the letters offered a more exciting way forward.

By framing his directives with religious imagery and revolutionary language, Berg made his desires appear empowering to the women. Moreover, because the women did not have many opportunities for frivolity, they likely saw these *Mo Letters* as giving them the chance to have more enjoyment in the group. As real, material, bodies (McGuire, 1990), these women had not experienced many pleasurable sensations up to this point. Their lives in the group thus far mostly had involved long hours of work and worship. The chance to experience the pleasure of feeling good in attractive clothes, in the company of men they might actually like, was very appealing. Unfortunately, Williams and other women soon found themselves deeply unhappy in the COG system that robbed them of more freedoms

[44] Provisioning was the group's way of obtaining food and other essential items. Members of the group went to restaurants, markets, and stores to request donations. Often children engaged in this work.

than it granted. Instead of liberating their bodies, the *Mo Letters* extended Berg's control over them.

IV Flirty Fishing: Women's Bodies as Recruitment Tools

In 1976, Berg started to disseminate his literature on Flirty Fishing (FFing) to the COG communes or "Homes" as the group called them. Thus, women across Europe, North America, South America, and Asia began to prostitute themselves for Berg. The practice of Flirty Fishing began on the island of Tenerife and was based on Maria's (Berg's second "wife") experiences with a man called Arthur whom she seduced in England into joining the group (Van Zandt, 1991, 46). The basic analogy that Berg used is that women are the "bait' and that men are the "fish" attracted to the bait. In "Flirty Little Fish" (Berg, 1974a) Berg discussed Maria's attempts to "hook" men:

> **HOOK THEM THROUGH HER FLESH!** Crucify her flesh, Lord, on the Barb of Thy Spirit! O God, even if it penetrate and crucify her flesh, impale her on the point of Thy Spirit that she may die, that those that feed of her flesh may be caught to live! O God, help her, O Jesus, to be willing to be the bait! (Berg, 1974a: 528).

Of the several illustrations in this letter, one shows a woman impaled on a fish hook, the point of the hook emerging though her body between her breasts. The caption reads "THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE FLESH!" On the same page, another drawing shows a woman dressed in hot pants, bra top, and high boots, dangling a fish-hook from her hand. The caption for this image reads "FISHERS OF MEN!" (Berg, 1974a: 530). Finally, on the last page of this letter, an illustration depicts a woman as

a mermaid impaled on a hook, but embracing a man, this time with the heading "HOOKER FOR JESUS" (Berg, 1974a: 535).

Berg told women to use their bodies to attract men with the aim of witnessing to them and recruiting them to the group. In the letters, Berg framed the act of prostitution in terms of giving one's love for God to the new recruits. He informed women that the ultimate commitment that they could make is to sacrifice their bodies in the name of Jesus and God. For example, in "God's Whores?" (Berg, 1976a) he told women that God wants them to FF; that it was not evil; that each woman was a representative of God; and that God cared for them deeply (Berg, 1976a: 4131). Moreover, he told them, "YOUR BODY IS THE VEHICLE THAT THE SPIRIT IS TRAVELLING IN . . . . It's your body that has do it, the body has to come first" (Berg, 1976a: 4132). Berg made the women's bodies profitable, when in 1978 he released "Make It Pay" in which he advised women to get money for their services (Berg, 1978a: 5228).

According to Berg, God loves whores, so he commanded them to "PROVE YOUR LOVE WITH SEX" because "THEY[MEN] GET FED UP WITH THESE SICKENING SELFISH WOMEN" (Berg, 1976a: 4134). The "sickening selfish" women he refers to are the women who were part of the feminist movement. He criticized them for not looking after men "properly." Likewise, in "Real Mothers" (Berg, 1975), Berg derided "THIS WOMEN"S LIB IDEA!" Maria and Berg wrote that women had been "brainwashed" into liberation, and that it was the COG's duty to "brainwash" them back into motherhood (Berg, 1975: 3521).

Thus, Berg's position is obvious. Women were recruitment tools for the group, and as such, they had to use their bodies for the cause. Furthermore, despite Berg's countercultural appeal, he did not promote the liberation of women and did not grant them equality. In the COG, Berg's patriarchal and authoritarian dictates bound the roles of women.

Berg even advised each woman that during the course of FFing, she would likely encounter a time when a man (fish) would attempt to rape her. Quoting scripture, he described forceful acts for which both Jesus and Moses forgave sinners. In this way, he implied that a woman should forgive the rapist. Berg also claimed that when a woman finds herself in such a situation, "The safest thing to do in some such cases is simply yield, or the girls could suffer violence!" (Berg, 1974b: 3821). Nevertheless, he did not necessarily blame the fish, "THE GIRL WHO DOES ALL THE REST AND THEN SUDDENLY DOESN'T WANT TO GO ALL THE WAY, IS REALLY GOING TO HAVE NOBODY BUT HERSELF TO BLAME" (Berg, 1974b: 3821). Moreover, he suggested that the women just give themselves willingly because "A rapist is going to fuck you anyway- - even if he has to fuck your dead body! - - It's been done!" (Berg, 1974b: 3825). He argued that women should *always* be willing *regardless of whether they want to or not,* "IF YOU GO AHEAD AND DO IT ONLY BECAUSE YOU WERE FORCED TO, THE LORD'S NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU MUCH CREDIT FOR THAT! (Berg, 1974b: 3825). The entire letter placed rape as the fault of the women. Berg blamed women for encouraging rape, and for saying "no" to sex with strangers when they actually mean "yes" (Berg, 1974b: 3822-3823).

Berg claimed to worship and adore women's bodies (for example, in one poem "Mountin' Maids" he wrote 300 lines just about women's breasts), but it is clear that he had absolutely no respect for women as people. He was not concerned either with their rights nor was with their well-being unless it directly affected their ability to pleasure men generally, and pleasure him specifically. By adopting a "blame the victim" approach to the rape of women, he revealed his own contempt for them, and the position of power that he felt over them.

Berg discussed the problem of sexually transmitted diseases in "Afflictions" (Berg, 1976b: 4188-4219). He began the publication claiming that he had contemplated stopping the practice of FFing because of the very real risks that it posed to the women. As he pondered the problem, however, he concluded that Jesus likely had contracted a venereal disease at some point too, and that there is no shame in doing so now. Thus, just as Jesus suffered disease, and more importantly, crucifixion, the women of the group should continue to sacrifice their bodies, "Even at the risk of afflictions!" (Berg, 1976b: 4219). Of the many illustrations in this letter the most alarming depicts a naked woman pinned to the bed by a giant nail through her vagina. To the left of the bed emerges an image of Christ on the cross (Berg, 1976b: 4198).

Berg's portrayal of women in the *Mo Letters* simultaneously elevated and denigrated the bodies of women. He *elevated* their status by equating their bodies with the divine realm. By commanding women to use their bodies to spread God's love, he encouraged women to redefine their concepts of self and of body. They had to perceive their bodies as objects for the distribution of God's love. By sharing their

bodies, they believed that they served the Lord. The process, however, of elevation was manipulative.

The women (and men) of the group already attributed Berg's word to the desires of God. As a result, the women truly believed that the letters on Flirty Fishing corresponded to God's will. Moreover, as Kent (1994b) established, group members obeyed orders out of fear of the consequences of disobedience. Additionally at work here, is the "double disempowerment" that Kent discussed. Already part of a group that instilled compliance to Berg's authority, the women suffered further repression by virtue of their gender. To overcome any dissonance that the women experienced, they likely attributed their sexual role to their higher cause. Given the high-demand environment in which they lived and the constant reverence of Berg and God, the women engaged the most meaningful attributions available to them. As Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick(1985) found, when the social context is religious, then the attribution tends to be religious in nature too (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985: 9, 12). Moreover, attributions also help to preserve a person's "positive self-concept" (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985:4). Thus women rejected the concept of prostitution as a self label, and instead understood themselves as witnessers for God.

Williams recounted her rationalization of FFing: "Accepting Family [COG] ideology by faith, I gave my body much as a soldier is taught to give his or her life" (Williams, 1998: 109). Her concept of self was theological: "Well the truth was, my body belonged first to God, then to the Family, then to my husband" (Williams, 1998: 111). Williams did not regard her body as *her own.* Thus, she had accepted that her body reflected only her desire to please Berg and to please God. Because of her view

of her body that she (and, I argue, other women in the group) developed, they came to accept that "Sexual favors to strangers was fast becoming our main method of witnessing about the Lord" (Williams, 1998: 114).

McGuire stressed that our individual agency in our social world is "accomplished through our bodies" (McGuire, 1990: 284). She asserted that social scientists are able to discern the degree of agency that an individual feels by that person's understanding of his or her body. Clearly, Williams did not regard her body as a source of personal power or as an agent of personal satisfaction. Her experience of her body was that it was suppressed, that it was the property of others. In this way, the group compromised her agency in her social environment. The continuous degradation of her body functioned as a continuous degradation of self.

Berg was the authoritarian ruler of this highly patriarchal group. The body clearly emerged as a site of power relations (McGuire, 1990). Berg commanded what women did with their bodies and they (very often) complied because of the attributions that they had made. The "regulated promiscuity" (Coser, 1974: 16) that Berg instituted ensured that women did not engage in exclusive relationships. In this way, he allowed males within the group free access to women, and attracted new male members by allowing men outside of the group to engage in sexual activity with the women as an enticement into the group.

V Children's Bodies

Berg's exploitation of children began with his own daughters, but his abuse of children may have been both inter-generational and non-familial in nature. He allegedly had incestuous relationships with two of his female granddaughters,

Joyanne and Merry (Countercog, 1999: 2; Kent, 1994a: 158-159). In some COG publications he also included sex-with-children scenarios in which he was the participating male (For example, "Heaven's Girl" [Berg, 1987: 338-339] and "The Little Girl Dream" [Berg, 1976c]) In the latter publication Berg described being in bed with a "dark haired little girl of about 10 or 11" (Berg, 1976c: 391) who seduced him (Berg, 1976c: 391-397). (Recall that one of the rationalizations that child abusers engage is that the child is a seductress.) In "Heaven's Girl" Berg alluded also to the grooming of young girls as Flirty Fishers (Berg, 1976c: 396).

Berg's antinomian approach to child-adult sexual relationships extended to the group, when in 1979 Berg issued the *Mo Letter*, "My Little Fish!" (1979a). As a result of this publication, "there was experimentation with small child sex including incest" (Van Zandt, 1991: 170). It is difficult to assess exactly to what degree adults engaged in the sexual abuse of the COG children, but as Chancellor (2000) noted, "throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, sexual activity between adults and children was an accepted practice in a number of communities." Moreover, he commented that of the people he interviewed for his book, those who had not experienced abuse themselves as minors knew of others who had (Chancellor, 2000: 223).

Berg published "My Little Fish!" in a volume titled *The Story of Davidito* (1982b), a collection of letters about Davidito, the son of Maria and a man whom she had Flirty-Fished. This particular *Mo Letter* contains nearly twenty photographs and is interspersed with text taken from other publications.[45] Some of the photographs

[45] An earlier edition of this publication (1979) included additional photographs including one titled "Now lets get something straight between us!" showing an adult women manually manipulating

depict Davidito with other children, engaged in mock sexual encounters. In one, a little girl is on top of him; the caption below reads "The girl who would!" The *Letter* included the children's ages. The little girl was just two years and three months old, and Davidito, only three years and five months of age (Berg, 1979a: 447). Several of the pictures show Davidito, around the same age, in bed with an adult woman. In one, the woman is lying on the bed, as Davidito approaches her breast with his lips—the caption reads "Our little mountain man!"[46] Another photograph shows him squeezing the woman's nipple. Yet another, shows Davidito and the woman in bed, embracing. The text below reads "When two lie together they shall have heat!" (Berg, 1979a: 446). At a younger age still, one photograph shows Davidito aged just twenty-two months of age. Naked, and standing on a sofa, with his head glancing over his shoulder, the wording below reads, "That 'come hither' look!" (Berg, 1979a: 445).

In another part of the book, the narrative once again turns to adult-child sex:

> "SEX! HE GETS QUITE EXCITED WHEN I WASH HIS BOTTOM AND HIS PENIE GETS REAL BIG AND HARD. I kiss it all over till [sic] he gets so excited he bursts into laughter and spreads his legs open for more. I wonder what it's going to be like when he begins to talk and asks me for more? (Berg, 1982b: 334-335).

While Gordon Melton asserts that in this publication, "There is no hint of sexual intercourse between adults and the Family's children" (Melton, 1994: 275), these

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Davidito's penis at age 2 years and 3 months. Another, ambiguous photograph shows an adult woman possible orally stimulating Davidito's penis.

[46] The "mountain man" title is a reference to Berg's "Mountin' Maid" poem about women's breasts.

types of relationships are well documented within academic literature, ex-member accounts, the popular press, and as is apparent, in the group's *own publications*. Melton even contradicts himself, having previously stated that some parents regarded *The Story of Davidito* as "encouragement to *begin doing it*" (Melton, 1994: 88 [emphasis added]), and that there was "the problem of sex between minors and adults" (Melton, 1994: 91). Scholars should not excuse the sexual exploitation of children in the COG—the abuse of their young bodies—regardless of the context in which the abuse occurs. The sexual abuse of children within a religious framework does not make it acceptable. Given that Melton, however, also defined Flirty Fishing as "a new form of evangelistic outreach" (Melton, 1994: 74), then perhaps it is not surprising that he is unwilling to defend the rights of children against molestation.

Several other COG publications sexualized the role of children in the group. For example, in "Heaven's Girl" (Berg, 1987), Berg told the fictional story of Marie-Clair, a young girl who fights the end-time armies of the antichrist. In this story, the girl allows the soldiers to rape her so that she might share God's love with them. Following the gang rape of Marie-Clair, the soldiers meant to kill her, but did not because as one soldier suggests, "**SHE WAS FANTASTIC!** – Why not keep her in one of the empty cages for our own use." (Berg 1987: 70-71). Former members state that the story of Marie-Clair paved the way for the role of teenage girls as Flirty Fishers (CounterCog, 1999: 9).

In the mid-1980s, the group made videos of women and children dancing nude. The sexually suggestive nature of the dances extended to ones that the children performed. Even Melton admits, "minors, both teens and preteens were allowed to

participate in making a video" (Melton, 1994: 86), although the term "allowed to participate" seems odd.

Berg's sexualization of children functioned to legitimate his own sexual needs. By encouraging the group members to adopt the same feelings and behaviours that he had, he fully sanctioned incest and pedophilia—behaviours that the social world outside of the group did not permit. For those adults in the group who did engage in the abuse of children, they followed Berg's publications on child sexuality just as they followed all of his other *Mo Letters*. By attributing Berg's words to God, they engaged in what they rationalised as a spiritually permissible activity.

VI The Padillo Family[47]

The Padillo Family joined the COG in 1976 in England, because the group appeared to represent a youthful, modern, and exciting approach to religion. Soon after joining, the leaders of their local group sent the Padillos to Costa Rica on a "mission." Willingly giving up jobs, money, family, and friends, the Padillos moved to the other side of the world, believing that they had joined "the best Christian group in the world." Although conditions were harsh, and obedience to leadership was total, Sylvia Padillo says that she truly believed that the hard work and dedication would pay off. Moreover, she argued that because the end-time prophecy dominated the belief system (Berg predicted the end of the world would occur in 1993), she felt it truly was her duty to recruit as many people as possible to the group, so that they too would find the road to salvation.

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[47] All information about the Padillo family is from John Smithson's (1994) documentary, *Children of God*. In this revealing and frank film, Sylvia and three of her daughters, Miriam, Victoria, and Deborah discuss their experiences in the COG.

When Sylvia and her husband first joined, they already had two daughters. Because the COG disallowed contraception, Sylvia ended up with a total of six children, a much larger family than she originally had in mind for herself. Believing that God directly inspired Berg's *Mo Letters*, Sylvia obediently did as he directed. The consequences of both her attribution of all that Berg wrote as coming from God, and her attendant obedience, proved dire for herself and her daughters. Her husband was involved in other relationships, and eventually she no longer saw him at all.

Sylvia was not comfortable with the group's policy of sexual sharing, but she believed that it was her duty to obey Berg and God. She maintained that to disobey meant being selfish, uncaring, and not carrying out God's will. Sylvia started having sexual relationships with men in the group who came to her for that purpose. She believed that she hid these encounters from her children, but both Deborah and Miriam recall their feelings of jealousy, hatred, and insecurity because of their mother's behaviour. When the FFing letters reached their group, Sylvia believed it her duty to win more souls for Christ, even if it meant having sex with more men. Again, she thought that her children were unaware of what she was doing, but Victoria remembered that by age seven she was fully conscious that her mother was Flirty Fishing.

While her daughters felt deeply betrayed, Sylvia felt trapped. She had a large family, no money, no job, and no outside contacts. She truly had forsaken all. She described her life as a constant cycle of child bearing, cooking, cleaning, and FFing. The worst though was yet to come. Her other daughter, Shuly, contracted Lupus and became gravely ill. Bored with her inability to do anything, Shuly read books, a

practice that Berg strictly forbade. Shuly decided to write to Berg and ask for his permission to read. Berg's response was devastating. He informed the Padillo's that Lupus was the "answer." In other words, he said that Shuly got Lupus because she read. Full of guilt, Shuly stopped taking her medication (another forbidden practice), and soon died. The final insult came when Berg produced a *Mo Letter* in which he and Shuly had sex in Heaven.

Miriam, Deborah, and Victoria all were abused by men in the group. Miriam remembered being groped, fondled, and harassed as a young child. She also recalled that the adults encouraged children to perform strip-tease routines. These adults said that God had given them beautiful bodies, so they should share them, and that, "Jesus wants you to do it." The first time Miriam felt pressure to strip, she ran and locked herself in the bathroom. She could not escape the pressure forever and by age fourteen she began to strip for the adults.

Deborah's abuse began when she was nine. A man who lived in the same home as the Padillo family physically abused her by day, and sexually molested her at night. When Sylvia discovered these abuses, she ordered the man to leave the house. Interestingly, she attributed blame to the individual man rather than to the group. By the time she was fifteen, the group leaders forced Deborah to have sex with them. Soon she had two children by two different men.

The acceptability of sexual contact between adults and children created situations where adults who otherwise would probably not have become sexually involved with minors, now did so. The pain and suffering that these girls experienced, and the scars that they have left, are a far cry from the "respect" that

Wangerin (1993: 175) argues sex with teenagers represented in the group. After eighteen years in the COG, Sylvia Padillo and her children finally managed to leave.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed many of the manipulative issues that emerged in the COG that resulted in women and children's bodies as loci of control. The translation of Berg's need for sexual power, and his status as a non-exclusive pedophile into the group setting are evident through the group's policies and doctrines on child sexuality. Likewise, his doctrines outlining the role of adult women in the group reflect Berg's continuous need for control, his manipulative personality, and his selfish need for self-satisfaction. Although I have given an account of Berg's upbringing, sexual behaviours, and his control issues, much remains unknown about his psychological make-up. Davis (1984) questioned his mental health status, wondering if her father was a psychopath because of his lack of "moral sensibility." She maintained that her father was entirely selfish, controlling, and power-hungry (Davis with Davis, 1984: 184-186). Extensive analysis of Berg's thousands of *Mo Letters,* many of which he dictated while drunk (Van Zandt, 1990: 20), might provide further clues to Berg and why he exerted such controls over all members in his group, but specifically the women and children. Thus, research opportunities remain, and a much fuller biopsychosocial profile of Berg may appear in the future.

My analysis of Berg and the COG has revealed some of the various ways that he placed women and children's bodies as loci of control. Moreover, I have explored many of the ways that the women and children of the group attempted to rationalize their situations. Additionally, my research illustrates the ways that attributional

processes contributed to the maintenance of the women's membership within the group, and their acceptance of and engagement in many practices that they experienced.

The women of the group adopted strategies that helped them to perceive their bodies and their behaviours in ways that did not threaten their sense of self and their religious convictions. Berg used them not only for his own pleasure and titillation, but also as a means to bring new members and money into the group.

The bodies of the women existed as part of their social world that in turn shaped their concepts of selfhood. Often, constant fatigue dulled these concepts of self and body. They did their work for Berg, for God, and (they believed) for their own salvation. Believing that they were doing God's work in the end days before the apocalypse, they forsook their bodies, offering them as sacrifices in order to bring more men into the group. They believed that by FFing these men, they brought them God's love and the opportunity for salvation.

Due to the exploitative nature of FFing, it may be that many of the women did not experience much (or any) pleasure. As Williams stated: "I did not experience pleasure in sex for many, many years. First it was a duty, then a tool, and finally a burden" (Williams, 1998: 110). The members of the group received the *Mo Letters* as the word of God, and as Williams reflected, "These dark, shameful letters would soon become the guiding light of my life as I surrendered my *body* to God's supposedly highest calling" (Williams, 1998: 96 [emphasis in original]). Although she felt conflicted about using her body in this way, she sought answers from within the group, rather than from friends, family, or any other external source. Thus, she

acquiesced and redefined the role and purpose of her body, and of her self (Williams, 1998: 96).

Like the members of Heaven's Gate, the members of the COG created their own unique social environment in which they followed very different norms from those in mainstream society. Within their social enclave, women's bodies reflected specific social meanings, particularly in terms of sexuality. Their bodies operated according to the COG's rules. As McGuire (1990) commented:

> Our bodies are manifestations of our selves in our everyday worlds. At the same time, embodiment is our way of knowing these worlds and interacting with them. . . . While each individual is uniquely embodied, the experience is also profoundly social. For example our experience of our bodies is mediated by learned roles and other expectations; *it is shaped by the immediate social context . . .*"
> (McGuire, 1990: 285 [emphasis added])

The women of the group learned new social roles, and their immediate social context did indeed influence their experiences. In this way, their bodies also became part of the power hierarchy that Berg instituted. Thus, their reconceptualization of their bodies and of their selves is understandable when we consider these social conditions.

Berg's beliefs also facilitated the abuse of children in the group setting, placing their immature bodies as sites of control. More than any other members of the group, children were subject to the power relations (McGuire, 1990) that emerged. As Judge Ward concluded:

> Children's consent to sexual activity can never be the product of a free will both because they do not have the maturity to understand the emotional consequences of any sexual engagement, but also because, due to the imbalance of power between adult and child, any decision of the child is made under influence and pressure (Ward, 1995: 112).

Many of the children express the consequences of these abuses in ex-member literature, and during the interviews that they give to academics (For example, Chancellor, 2000). In terms of the connections between individual agency and the social setting (McGuire, 1990: 284), the children had less personal control over their bodies than did the women. The Padillo family daughters articulated that they felt trapped, isolated, and helpless in their situation. They had nowhere to go and no one to turn to, thus their bodies suffered the abuses that Berg had decreed as God's will. Many children did not grow up with healthy concepts of their bodies and of them selves. Rather, some felt frightened and confused, and experienced feelings of shame and anger not of pleasure and satisfaction (Smithson, 1994). Thus, the claims about well-being that Berg promoted to the adults who received the *Mo Letters* on child sexuality were false. (For example, he claimed that by initiating children into sex from an earlier age they would grow up happier and healthier, and with positive self-concepts.)

The members' commitment to Berg was total, and—with the continuous production of *Mo Letters—B*erg directed them to follow his words (claiming that they came from God). Deborah Davis understood the ways that her father operated only

too well: "By coercing, intimidating, and playing on a person's sense of pride—not wanting to be the one left out or the one who failed the Lord—Moses David brought his disciples into line" (Davis with Davis, 1984: 187). Each of these disciples engaged in patterns of attribution that not only allowed them to endure severe punishments and hardships (Kent, 1994), but also to assimilate patterns of behaviour into their world with little or no questioning.

With the Jesus Movement in mind (which is the tradition from which the COG emerged), Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) discussed individuals who relinquished their individual freedoms and desires and instead adopted a "ready made system." In this way, the disciples attributed experiences and behaviours not to themselves, but to desires of their God (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1975: 327). In the same way that patterns of attribution arose within the group setting in Heaven's Gate, so too did they emerge in the communal settings of the COG. Each renewal of commitment and faith by one member served to reinforce the commitment and faith of others in the group. Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985) posited that when individuals feel that their peers will accept and like them because they make a particular attribution, then those persons indeed are likely to make those attributions (Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985: 13).

The members of the COG were religiously motivated people, and Berg exploited their eagerness to be part of a religious "revolution." No matter how extreme his demands were, his followers usually complied, engaging in patterns of attribution to rationalize their behaviours. For them, to look for answers elsewhere, they would have to have questioned their own faith. Both Davis (1984) and Williams

(1998) stated many times that fear of failure and accusations of selfishness often ensured that members continued to behave the way that Berg (whom they believed mediated God's word) wanted them to.

In this chapter, I have discussed many of the ways that Berg controlled women's and children's bodies. But there are many more facets to this complex group than I have had the chance to explore within the scope of my thesis, and as such remain open to further research. For example, I have not discussed the role of men in the group, and the often contradictory feelings they had about their spouses' Flirty Fishing. Not all men in the group engaged in promiscuous sex with many female partners, and not all men (or women) began incestuous relationships with their children. Thus, although attribution theory helps to explain why some people engaged in such behaviours, other questions remain. Why did some people *not* engage in these practices even though they had Berg's permission (thus, reputedly God's permission) to do so?

Berg also encouraged child-child sex, an activity that I have not examined in detail. He produced many publications that encouraged children not only to explore their bodies, but also to engage in full sexual relationships. Moreover, Berg sanctioned childhood marriage (Berg, 1977). Opportunities exist for research into these facets of the group, especially within the context of socialization and the normalization of childhood sexual activity. Even these unexplored questions, however, have significant connections to the issues of 'the control of bodies' that I have discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Literature on the body from non-religious perspectives is quite extensive, and much of it takes a phenomenological, philosophical, or historical approach.[48] In addition, sociologists such as Bryan Turner (1992; 1994; 1997) have written extensively on the social ordering of bodies. Many researchers, particularly religious historians, have examined the role of the human body from a historical-religious perspective. Thus, many publications exist that observe and analyse the role of the human body and its connection to beliefs about salvation and redemption, particularly during Biblical times and the Middle Ages.

Many more studies examine the nature of the body within different religious traditions, but this form of investigation has not moved substantially into sociological research of religion, and therefore remains the purview (for the most part) of theological and historical discussion. The purpose of my thesis, however, has been to locate the body within a social scientific approach to religion (or, more specifically, new religious movements). Moreover, my emphasis has been not only to locate the body within these types of groups, but also to contribute to the research of these particular groups themselves.

In 1990, sociologist Meredith McGuire made her plea to sociologists of religion to adopt a bodily perspective to understand some of the dynamics of religious experience. McGuire posited that, "The social sciences of religion could be transformed by taking seriously the fact that humans are embodied" (McGuire, 1990: 283). She continued:

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[48] For example, see: Feher, Naddaff and Tazi *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (1989); Leder *The Absent Body* (1990); Welton ed. *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader* (1998).

> Present social science conceptions of our subjects are particularly disembodied. Whether we are analyzing individual believers or religious organizations or religious ideas, the relationship of humans to their own bodies and to the bodies of others is remote or altogether absent from most of our work. How might our understanding of religion be different if we proceeded as though the people involved had bodies?

Moreover, McGuire called for a holistic approach that understands the body in social, cultural, psychological, and biological terms.

As discussed previously, Sarah Coakley's (1997) edited volume, *Religion and the Body*, brought together contemporary discussions of bodily rituals, practices, and beliefs within historical and contemporary religious contexts. Coakley invited each of the contributors to examine religious beliefs about the body and associated practices and behaviours within specific religious settings, so that they might understand better how religion shapes the body within those contexts. Moreover, Coakley emphasized that the behaviours that people engage in not only reinforce the beliefs, but also diminish the dichotomy between "thought/action" (Coakley, 1997: 8-9). In this way, the body emerges as an enmeshed part of a religious system.

Religion and the Body brought forth discussions about the location of the body in such diverse religious belief systems including Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Japanese religion, and Sufism. In this way, each chapter supplements the overviews and generalizations that others have made about bodily

practices in religious traditions. (Coakley described them as "undifferentiated" discussions [Coakley, 1997: 5]) (Coakley, 1997: 4-7.)

Just as each of the contributing chapters to Coakley's (1997) volume explored specifically defined religious contexts, my analyses of Heaven's Gate and the Children of God look at very specific beliefs and practices within the boundaries of particular new religious movements. The purpose of these investigations is threefold. First, they explore the body as a locus of control in new religious movements. Second, they examine how bodily expressions contribute to the in-group/out-group dichotomy that typically emerges in these settings. Third, they are contributions to the study of each of the groups themselves.

Not only does my thesis examine the body as a locus of control, but it also explores the nature of the relationship between the leader of the group and the people who follow his[49] particular directives. Moreover, in much in the same way that Kent (1994b) adapted religious attribution theory (Proudfoot and Shaver, 1997; Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick, 1985) to the study of new religious movements, I have supplemented my understanding of the body in Heaven's Gate and the Children of God using this theory. With the exception of Chidester (1988) and Puttick (1997),

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[49] Most traditional religions have emerged as patriarchal institutions, and with a few notable exceptions, men front most new religious movements. Women have, however, led several new religious movements. For example, Elizabeth Clare Prophet led the Church Universal and Triumphant; Anne Hamilton Byrne headed The Family (no connection to the COG/Family), in Australia; and, Marian Keech (pseudonym) was at the centre of the UFO group that Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956) investigated and from which they subsequently developed their theory on failed prophecies and cognitive dissonance (Festinger [1957]).

Many of the men who have been at the centre of new religious movements have had the support of women. For example, Marshall Applewhite credited his partner, Bonnie Lu Nettles as his teacher and guide; David Berg narrated many of his *Mo Letters* to his lover and aide, Maria, and she even contributed to the content of some of his publications; and Rajneesh allowed his assistant, Sheela to take over much of the organization of his ashram in Oregon. The relationship between leaders and partners is one that affords opportunities for some interesting research.

little other research connects the body and new religious movements. My investigation therefore, of Marshall Applewhite and Heaven's Gate, and of David Berg and the Children of God further establishes the role of the body within these settings and the relationship that exists between leadership and the manifestations of bodily control.

Although new religious movements typically exist in tension with mainstream society (McGuire, 1997: 148-149) and thus are less integrated into society than are mainstream religions, they often are based upon traditional faiths. Consequently, my discussion of the body in the context of new religious movements often echoes some of the bodily issues that emerged in traditional religions.

Applewhite shaped the Heaven's Gate belief system partly on traditional Christian scripture, but he infused the belief system with his delusions and hallucinations so that he melded Christian theology with an elaborate belief in extra-terrestrial transformation. The traditional aspects of Christian religion are evident in his ascetic approach (although, as I argue, his uncertainty about his sexuality combined with his schizophrenia, intensified his sexual denial). The bodily abstinences that he adopted for himself and decreed for others in the group echo the ascetic denials of the body of Catholic nuns and monks, and of the Protestant sects. Moreover, as I described in *Chapter Three*, bodily control permeated nearly every aspect of the Heaven's Gate belief system and practices. Applewhite controlled bodily activities such as sexual intimacy, leisure, diet, work, and sleep. His control regimes were at times highly innovative, as his institution of practices like "check partners," "tomb time," "Central," and "eyes" reveal.

I argue, therefore, that the discussion of the body as a site of control is just as relevant in new religious movements as it is for traditional or mainstream religions. As much of the literature on the body (whether religiously based or otherwise) posits, our bodies are central to our lives. Thus, explicit and implicit forms of bodily control influence our experiences within these contexts. Within new religious movements such as Heaven's Gate and the Children of God, the forms of control very often were quite explicit, and (as my discussion of McGuire's criteria illustrated), they often resulted in influential changes to peoples' embodied experiences. Moreover, the attributional processes that I discuss reveals further how people rationalize some of these experiences in terms of the religious settings in which they occur.

In addition to the contribution to bodily analysis within new religious movements, my thesis also augments the existing literature on each group. Most of the research on Heaven's Gate has described in detail many of the peculiarities of their beliefs and behaviours (for example, Balch [1995]; Balch and Taylor [1976; 1977; 2002]), as well as analysing patterns of commitment and obedience in the group (for example, Balch [1980]; Davis [2000]). My discussion of body issues supplements this previous research.

In my analysis of Heaven's Gate, I support and expand on Alfred Honig's (1997) diagnosis that Marshall Applewhite suffered from schizophrenia. Applewhite's mental state was of great importance to my understanding of some of the body issues that emerged within this group, and I posit that my analysis of the role of the leader in these types of high-demand closed environments specifically warrants an examination of the leadership in order to understand some of the social dynamics of the group.

Clarke (1988) and Kent (1994b) have already shown the utility of such an approach to the study of new religious movements, thus my thesis takes its cue from their work. The importance of interaction between the individual and the group became particularly evident in Heaven's Gate, and I argue that this approach is likely a useful one for analysis of other high demand religious settings.[50] As Howe (1997) argued, an understanding of the individual can help to explain events and behaviours that seem otherwise incomprehensible (Howe, 1997: 238).

Likewise, my analysis of David Berg and the Children of God revealed that the complex interaction between the individual leadership and the beliefs and behaviours of the group are often manifested in the bodily experiences and expressions of the group members. In this case, I focused on the women and the children of the group in order to illustrate the connection between Berg's view of their bodies, and how he translated these views into the group setting. Moreover, those ex-members who have chosen to discuss their often painful experiences illustrate further the nature of bodily control in the COG communes (for example, Davis with Davis [1984]; Williams [1998]).

Although the members of the COG did not all live together in one setting, each commune or Home had a group leader who specifically directed the group in accordance with the *Mo Letters* that Berg issued. Thus, each Home operated as a

[50] New religious movements and ideological groups of recent times that have been led by particularly persuasive and charismatic leaders include Aum Shinrikyo, the Branch Davidians, the Raelians, Scientology, the Rajneesh, and the Unification Church.

functional unit of the COG religion, and in most cases, each conformed to Berg's doctrines.[51]

I have analysed the control of women's bodies in the COG as a function of Berg's personal desires in terms of sexuality, control, and the need for financial gain. Again, this discussion looks at the specific context of the group setting, and the specific role that the body took therein. What is interesting to note, is that the control of women's bodies in this group occurred exactly at the time when women in mainstream society were making social and political gains as mediated by the feminist movement. As Kent (2001) commented:

> By far the most manipulative use of feminist rhetoric against women occurred in the Children of God. Its leader, David Berg, specifically appropriated the language and images of women's liberation in a manner that subjected women to numerous pregnancies, traditionalist family roles, subservience to men, prostitution, physical violence, and general sexual exploitation (Kent, 2001: 163).

Moreover, sexism was part of the larger Jesus movement of the time (Kent, 2001: 164-165).

The patriarchal nature of traditional religions and the implications for the female body is well documented[52] and as Puttick (1997) has shown, many opportunities exist

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[51] Williams (1998) stated that some of the Homes were slightly more relaxed than others. She lived in the Paris home for a period and her experiences there were quite different from those in other locations. The Paris Home housed the COG musicians (including former Fleetwood Mac guitarist, Jeremy Spencer). The relative freedom in Paris was because, as recording artists, the band brought both financial support to, and wider appeal for the group. Keeping these members happy therefore was important.

to expand this discussion to the context of new religious movements. Other scholars have looked at the role of sexuality (both male and female), and the religious suppression and expression of it.[53]

Although gender contributed to the location of women's bodies as sites of control in the COG, Berg also promoted the sexualization of children, regardless of their gender. Moreover, as I indicated at the end of my discussion on the COG, an examination of the role of the men within the group would also reveal the mechanisms of control as they related to the body in the group context. After all, the men were also followers of Berg's word, and adhered to those doctrines that he set out for the group. The control of men's bodies within the group is perhaps not so obvious (nor so dramatic) as that applied to the women's, but no doubt it existed at least at an implicit level nonetheless. Moreover, my discussion of the body in the COG focused on sexually abusive practices that occurred within the group. Other avenues of research exist still. For example, the punitive system in the COG, especially in terms of child discipline, was quite severe. Thus, physical punishment of the body in the COG (and in other new religious movements and ideological groups) also is open to study.

The opportunities for further study of the body as a locus of control within new religions is (I argue) wide open. One need only recall the events of recent history to see how some new religious movements shape belief systems and adherents in ways

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[52] For example see: Cooey, Eakin and McDaniel *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (1991); James *Women in American Religion* (1980); and Shorter *A History of Women's Bodies* (1982).

[53] For example see: Eisler, Riane *Sacred Pleasure* (1996); Ranke-Heinmann *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church* (1990); Wiesner-Hanks *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (2000).

that often put peoples' bodies under control, and even in danger (sometimes fatally so).

Although most people can recall the terrible events of the Branch Davidian barricade at Waco, Texas in 1993, fewer know the details of the group's leader, David Koresh and the extreme influence that he had over his dedicated followers. The control that he had over his devotees extended to their bodies. He separated married couples; he had sexually manipulative relationships with several of his female followers; and he enforced celibacy on others. He sexually abused some of the younger girls; he restricted people's access to food and water; and he advocated severe physical punishment of children (Rifkind and Harper, 1994: 68-71; Breault and King, 1993: 81, 152). Like so many other leaders, Koresh abused his followers' religious devotion by manipulating both their beliefs and their bodies.

In the same year (1993), Canadian Roch Theriault was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of one of his female followers. Theriault (who called himself Moses) had established a small commune in Ontario. There, he developed an authoritarian rule over his group. A series of appalling abuses took place in the commune that he established in 1987. Theriault, who acquired eight "wives" and fathered twenty-five children, decreed that the end of the world was imminent, and that only he could lead people into a new future (Kaihla and Laver, 1994: 16). Unfortunately, that future included beatings and floggings; intimidation; hard labour; inadequate diet; sexual abuse; and torture. (For example, Theriault castrated a boy with a butcher's knife, and amputated the arm of surviving member, Gabrielle Lavallee.) Most horrifying of all, Theriault partially disembowelled one of his female

followers when she complained of stomach problems. The woman died, and after he buried her in the forest, he had several others open up her grave so that he could desecrate her remains (Lavallee, 2002).

Just one year later, twenty-three people in Switzerland committed suicide. At the same time, five people died in Quebec, Canada—one of them a baby who had been stabbed six times. All the victims in both cases were followers of Luc Jouret and his associates, the leaders of the Order of the Solar Temple. Then, in 1995 and in 1997, twenty-one more people died in locations in France and Canada. This "quasi-Catholic mystical" sect has generated much debate as to its beliefs, and the conditions that wrought the suicide and murder of its members (Hall and Schuyler, 2000).

Group settings such as these are open to study from many perspectives including one similar to that engaged in my thesis. Although the aforementioned examples are extreme cases, they exemplify the need not only for studies that look at body control in these types of settings, but also for analyses of the group leaders who are responsible for implementing the control regimes. As demonstrated, attribution theory helps to establish why certain patterns of behaviour and belief exist within the context of religions, new religious movements, and other ideological and high-demand groups. As long as such group settings exist, then the need to understand them also will remain.

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